Miracle

Clarence Budington Kelland

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Miracle

BOOKS BY
CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

MIRACLE
THE STEADFAST HEART
CONFLICT
CONTRABAND
SCATTERGOOD BAINES
YOUTH CHALLENGES
EFFICIENCY EDGAR
THE HIDDEN SPRING
THE HIGHFLYERS
THE LITTLE MOMENT OF HAPPINESS
THE SOURCE
SUDDEN JIM
THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER
CATTY ATKINS, FINANCIER
CATTY ATKINS, RIVERMAN
CATTY ATKINS, SAILORMAN
CATTY ATKINS
MARK TIDD
MARK TIDD IN THE BACKWOODS
MARK TIDD IN BUSINESS
MARK TIDD'S CITADEL
MARK TIDD, EDITOR
MARK TIDD, MANUFACTURER

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MIRACLE

by

Clarence Budington Kelland

Author of "The Steadfast Heart,"
"The Little Moment of Happiness," Etc.

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MIRACLE

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MIRACLE

Chapter *One*

"One should always approach Quebec from the sea," Jim Brokaw was saying to his wife and Ellen Copeland as they stood upon that magnificent promenade to which has been given the name of Dufferin Terrace. "To enter the city from the landward," he went on in his studied, cultured voice, "is like climbing up the stem of a rose to view it from underneath. . . . No, Quebec should be approached from sea or air—a butterfly view."

The elderly woman—his wife—and the girl, Donovan Steele's fiancée, rested their hands upon the railing to peer silently down upon the splendid reaches of that broad, historic river. They were standing, Brokaw said to himself—for he loved to deck his conversation with apt imagery—upon the threshold of a city, looking downward and outward at a highway of the world—a highway thronged with lights which came and went, bringing men and women, bringing other languages and customs, bringing the new and the tried, but bringing them to a rock of granite, unchanging, unchangeable. The world surged against this rock, but could neither cut nor alter it. And in his heart he was grateful for the solidity of it, for the inertia of it, which preserved it through the centuries, holding it ever as it had been from the beginning—a city of old France, a fortress stern, frowning, which, once gazed upon, seized the dull fires of the imagination and fanned them to flame. . . . Brokaw was by way of being a connoisseur of cities, and, to him, in all

the world was none other spread upon a site of such splendor as this.

"Where are the others?" asked Ellen Copeland, turning very bright, demanding eyes for an instant upon Brokaw.

"The boys wanted to bathe before dinner—after driving through from Montreal. I suppose Jane is putting in cuff buttons for Tad."

Ellen turned back to the river, eyes slightly narrowed. It was impossible to determine if she were seeing what lay before her —the great liner warping into dock this side the Tidal Basin, Levis on its hills across the river, the great island, gray in the distance—or if she were occupied with private thoughts. Presently she spoke.

"Ellen's method is to coddle her husband," she said, and there was a bit of edge upon her liquid voice. "I don't think it works out."

"Then," said Mrs. Brokaw, smilingly, "you evidently don't intend to coddle Donovan."

"I much prefer to be the coddled," said Ellen . . . "and it's safer."

"Pleasanter, certainly," said Mr. Brokaw.

"Safer," said Ellen, with emphasis. "Habit, you know. Start a man to doing things for you at the beginning and he'll keep on doing them. That's the way to hold a husband."

"When I was a girl," said Mrs. Brokaw, "we did not worry about holding our husbands. It never occurred to us that we might lose them."

"Times have changed," said Miss Copeland, succinctly. "I think I shall bathe and dress before dinner, myself. At what time—seven?"

"That will do nicely," said Mrs. Brokaw. She watched Ellen's graceful, modish figure move across the esplanade with doubtful eyes, then glanced at her husband as if, from his expression,

she hoped to glean his judgment of this girl who was soon to marry Donovan Steele. He was looking upward to the stern bastions of the Citadel above them, his imagination reveling in the romance of older days. It was of Frontenac, of the Wicked Intendant who leaned so heavily upon the favor of Pompadour, of the days of the Chien d'Or, of Wolfe and Montcalm and Arnold, that he was thinking—not of the lonely boy of strange moods who had become his friend; not of the ultra-modern, sophisticated girl that boy was to make his wife.

Mrs. Brokaw moved impatiently; there were times when she wished her husband would live more in the present year, more in actualities and materialities. Yet, withal, she knew there was in James Brokaw a fine, firm foundation of practicality, and that his eye, though it might seem clouded by dreams, was more than ordinarily keen and discerning.

"What will that girl do to Donovan?" she asked.

He turned, and his lips bent in that gentle smile which demanded trust and friendship from all the world—that smile which, more than any other quality, had won for him the companionship, if not the reluctant friendship, of young Steele.

"It is not what the girl will do to him," he said. "She is only an item, a digit in the problem. What will life do to him?"

"Jim," said his wife, "what is it that is in Donovan's eyes?"

"What, I pray God, may never be in mine, nor in eyes of a son of mine . . . fear."

"You mean that he is a coward? That he is always afraid? Of what?"

"He is afraid that what has happened will happen again."

"And that is?"

"Betrayal of his trust by men and women he loves."

Mrs. Brokaw was silent a moment. Then, "He is so gentle," she said, irrelevantly.

"Gentle? Well, possibly. *I* shouldn't call it that. It's not so easy of definition. It's true, my dear, it takes the form of gentleness. . . . No, if I were to give it a name I would say it was the shadow of tragedy. It is rather an apprehensive waiting to see what sinister trick life will play upon him next. . . . Poor boy! He is one of those unfortunate beings born into the world with an extraordinary capacity for loyalty and affection."

"That," said Mrs. Brokaw, "should make for happiness."

"If all the world were you, my dear. . . . But it isn't. If individuals were savings banks in which you could deposit your love and your trust—savings banks which never went into receivership—then Donovan might be the happiest man alive. Do you know what he said to me one night? Um. . . . 'It may be,' he said, 'that God is only a name. It doesn't do to trust in him too fully without guaranties.'"

"Poor boy."

"He worshiped his mother. She abandoned him to divorce his father, and is now living in Geneva with another husband. He has never seen nor heard from her. . . . There was a tutor the boy loved, a man who was with him constantly for years—who turned out a thief. His father, trustee of the fortune Donovan's grandmother left him, speculated with the boy's money—embezzled a great sum, in effect—and then, afraid to face the music, deserted his son and is living in Paris. It was not so much the embezzlement as the desertion. . . . Every investment Donovan has made in love and loyalty has proven a swindle."

"Strange it hasn't hardened him," said Mrs. Brokaw.

Her husband looked at her oddly. "Perhaps," he said, "the mass has not had time to set."

"I cannot but wish he had chosen another girl."

"It is on the knees of the gods," said Brokaw. "The boy

seems to have made another investment in her—and in Ted Loftus. It's a disease with him. When he gives love or friendship he empties the spring. . . . Somehow I admire him. It must demand unusual courage and strength of soul to have been swindled in his trusts as he has been, and yet remain what he is to-day. . . ."

"It's in his eyes—all of it. Something is there that makes one want to cry." Then again, with feminine irrelevancy, "What a wonderful, big, handsome boy he is!"

"He rowed stroke for Oxford," said Mr. Brokaw.

"Educated abroad?"

"God knows how he was educated! By fits and starts, in France, in Germany, in Italy, in England. He has been skipped about the world like a pebble across a pond from the hand of a careless child. Haphazard."

Mr. Brokaw stopped, abruptly drew out his watch and held it toward his wife. "We've just time to slick up a bit before dinner," he said.

Half an hour later the six tourists met in Ted Loftus's room to the accompaniment of a cocktail shaker. Donovan Steele was last to enter, standing just inside the doorway, his face grave and, as always when in repose, expressing a vague, haunting question. His brown eyes rested on one, then another of his friends, rested longer and more intently than is normal—as if each were a riddle to which he wistfully sought the answer. Ted held the shaker aloft.

"Don't have to muffle it here," he said, gayly. "To-night's your night to break the long drought—it's legal." He laughed and turned his face toward Ellen Copeland. "Wonder how it'll be to taste a legal drink. Hope it doesn't spoil the flavor." He commenced turning the frapped drink into the glasses. "I'm pouring one for you, Don," he said.

Donovan smiled faintly and shook his head. "No," he said.

"You're a stubborn old egg. . . . Ellen, think of all the bad habits you've got to teach your husband."

"I'm marrying him to reform him," the girl said, flippantly.

"Leave Don alone," said Nellie Loftus. "He's unique in this day and I like him that way."

"It isn't virtue that keeps him a teetotaler," laughed Ted. "Drink doesn't agree with his stomach."

"I fancy," said Donovan, "that a stomach or a broken leg or a lame lung is at the root of most virtue."

"What do we do after dinner?" Ellen asked, as if the thought of an idle evening were intolerable to her restlessness; as if there was that within her which could not tolerate pause or repose.

"I saw a show advertised—amateur thing—given by the Junior League of Montreal," said Ted. "I've always heard Montreal society could turn up a mess of mighty pretty girls. . . . Musical thing."

"Oh, let's go," said Mrs. Loftus. "I was in our last Junior League play, and I want to see if Montreal classes with New York."

"In that case," said Ted, "let's have *two* cocktails. I'll need something to bear me up through an amateur performance."

"I fancy," said Mr. Brokaw, "that you're approaching a pleasant surprise. I know what Montreal can do. . . . And now—at my age one's mind turns pleasantly toward the dining table. Shall we go down?"

"James talks like a gourmet, but eats like a sparrow," said Mrs. Brokaw as they turned toward the door. Ted Loftus took Ellen Copeland's arm and led the way, Mr. Brokaw and Mrs. Loftus followed, while Donovan and Mrs. Brokaw brought up the rear. They waited for the temperamental elevator and descended to the spacious dining room chaperoned on their downward way by a diminutive elevator boy of

limited English but wide-flung courtesy, whose inevitable greeting of, "What floor, gen-til-*man?*" is known to every guest of the Château.

From the menu card, printed of necessity both in English and in French, they selected an admirable meal to the accompaniment of Mr. Brokaw's learned comments upon the cookery of various nations. Donovan Steele sat, as was his custom, in a silence which could not be called taciturnity—for there was something companionable about it—answering only when addressed directly, not joining in the chatter of which Ted Loftus was the leader. It was sophisticated chatter, filled with catch phrases of the day, in which Ellen Copeland matched him phrase for phrase. Mrs. Brokaw sat tolerant but not approving, and Mr. Brokaw's eyebrows were often raised in pain at the careless handling of a language which he had made it his avocation to speak with a pedantic purity.

"Now for the show," Loftus said. "I'm honing to see Montreal shake a foot."

"Let's go in those two-wheeled things," his wife suggested. "I don't believe anybody ever rides in them but tourists. What do they call them?"

"Caleches," said the traveled Mr. Brokaw.

"They look the part," Ted said. "Come on, Ellen. The modern rule is that husbands and wives mustn't be seen together. I'm all for going a step ahead of the times and making it take in engaged couples."

"I'm glad," observed Mrs. Brokaw, "that *my* engagement days fell in the 'eighties."

Ellen Copeland looked at her with slightly narrowed eyes, and one could see that her keen, restless brain was phrasing a tart rejoinder which, undoubtedly, would be thoroughly modern in its philosophy. She glanced sidewise at Donovan's grave, questioning face, however, and changed her mind. She

smiled at her fiancé, whose eyes softened and lightened in response. Somehow one was reminded of alms being tossed from a carriage to a roadside beggar.

They took their places in the quaint vehicles in the order in which they had come to dinner, Donovan again forming the rearguard with Mrs. Brokaw. If he was disappointed, if he would have preferred a seat beside his slender, youthful, lovely fiancée, there was no reflection of it in the fine, rather old-fashioned courtesy which was his compliment to the white-haired woman who sat by his side. It is true, he was silent, but then he was never talkative; his manner was not so much diffident as gravely retiring—that of a spectator, present at, but not a part of, what went on about him.

They clattered down the cobbled hill at the right of the Place d'Armes, turned into Buade Street past the ruins of the Basilica, so unaccountably destroyed by fire, and then, by steep descents, through narrow winding streets, past fascinating squares and buildings which might be set down without offense in Avignon or in Dijon, clattering and jolting in leisurely, roundabout fashion toward the theater which was their destination.

Mrs. Brokaw, as if moved by sudden impulse, laid her hand upon Donovan's knee, accompanying the motherly gesture with no word. Donovan turned his head with a quick, surprised movement, peered into her eyes with that questioning stare, and then smiled. It was a slow smile, one which did not come readily, one which was not to be had by everyone for the asking. It passed into Mrs. Brokaw's heart and remained there, warmly. It was a comfortable smile to have in one's heart, especially if that heart be one which longed for and was denied a son.

"Donovan," she said, presently, "I want you to like me."

"I do like you, Mrs. Brokaw," he said in the gracious manner which was his—more especially with elderly women.

"I don't mean just *like*," she said. "Of course you like me—as a pleasant acquaintance, as an older woman who is not altogether a loss as a companion—but cannot you like me as a friend?"

"A friend," said Donovan, rather as if he paused to muse on the meaning of the word.

"A true friend," said Mrs. Brokaw, "who would welcome you in trouble even more quickly than in happiness."

"Friends," said Donovan, slowly, "I have found to be like guns one doesn't know are loaded."

"And which go off when you least expect it—and wound you."

Suddenly his face changed, became older; the youth of it was blanked out by a look of apprehension, of dread. "I think," he said in a low tone, and Mrs. Brokaw knew he was not speaking to her, but thinking aloud unguardedly, "—I think another gun going off would kill me."

"Then you don't care to try?"

"Mrs. Brokaw," he said, "I'm no gambler—not with such stakes on the table. I do not dare."

"I'm sorry," she said, and then, "At least I shall be *your* friend. . . . And, Donovan, I hope, oh, how I hope you will be happy."

"I don't know that I hope for happiness, or expect it. I shall be satisfied with—anæsthetics."

She pondered this. It was a dreadful thing for this boy to sit by her side and to tell her the best he hoped from life was freedom from agony—the utmost he hoped, to be passed unnoticed by the somber figure of tragedy. Her heart bled for him. . . . He was afraid; his life was lived under the cloud of a never-lifting dread. He distrusted man, and, as a

natural concomitant to that, he distrusted God. . . . She could not forbear another question; it demanded to be asked.

"Donovan, if the thing that has happened should happen again—what would happen? What do you fear? . . . You say it would kill you. You don't mean—I'm sure you cannot mean—that you would lift your hand against yourself?"

He shook his head. "Suicide. No, not that. It could never be the way out for me. I don't know why, but it couldn't. . . . No, what I fear is that I—as I am, as I would like to be—would come to an end. Die, if you will. And that another man—I have caught glimpses of him"—he drew his shoulders together as if touched by a sudden chill—"and that another man who lives in me would come to life, would take charge of me, own me. . . . But that's silly, isn't it? You have made me talk about myself, and that isn't good form."

It was given to Mrs. Brokaw's sympathy to understand. She understood and shuddered, because her experience had taught her that in every human creature there resides another who may, in some crisis, break the bonds which hold him down, which submerge him in that primary, objective personality which is one's self, and, as Donovan said, *take charge*.

"My boy," she said, "I shall pray for you."

His face was set; he did not turn his head as he spoke, but he said a thing which Mrs. Brokaw could never erase from her memory.

"What a thing it would be," he said, "if God listened to the prayers of the world—and laughed!"

She caught her breath.

Chapter *Two*

Donovan and Mrs. Brokaw rejoined the others at the entrance to the theater. When they entered, the house light had already been darkened and the performance was in progress.

"I do hope," said Ellen Copeland to Ted Loftus, "that they don't recite nursery rhymes and have flag drills."

"It looks," said Loftus, casting an experienced and appraising eye at the chorus of young ladies who occupied the stage, "as if they *wouldn't*."

He was right. There was beauty, there were voices, there were evidences of careful rehearsal and of skilled training in the dance. There was even humor. The show itself was as incoherent as your most *blasé* first-nighter could demand of any Broadway musical comedy. After the first number Mrs. Brokaw leaned across Donovan and Mrs. Loftus to speak to her husband.

"Jim," she said, "I ask you—did you notice that girl?"

"No need to ask which girl," said Mr. Brokaw. "I noticed her. In spite of my age, my dear, my eyesight is still excellent."

"She's lovely," said Mrs. Loftus.

"She's more than lovely," said Mr. Loftus in the tone of a connoisseur. "She's got something—the spark. What producers call the ability to put herself over. Personality, fire, youth, voice, grace—and that ingratiating way which reaches out and seizes the audience to make it love her. . . . And probably—worse luck—she's somebody and the stage will never know her."

From that moment the evening consisted of moments when

this girl was on the stage and of moments when one waited for her return. She was generous with herself, or the show was generous with her, for she ran through it like a jeweled thread, flashing, twinkling, ravishing. Many lovely girls were there—some, perhaps as beautiful of face and figure as she—but, as Mr. Brokaw said, she stood out from them all like a tongue of flame among blades of grass. Unspoiled, unconscious, she seemed. Joyousness radiated from her, and the daring of youth. She seemed, in the dance, a sprite freshly emerged from some magical well of happiness.

"Who is she?" Mrs. Brokaw asked. "I *must* know her name."

Donovan Steele consulted his program in the dim light. "I can't quite make it out," he said. "I think it's French. The intermission will be coming presently and then we can see."

"I'm in love with her," Mrs. Brokaw said, firmly, "and I shouldn't in the least blame my husband if he abandoned me this night and went off in pursuit. . . . That child is made to be loved. You can't imagine her having a care. See her, Donovan—see her! French, you say—she doesn't look French. She's so fair."

"What ankles," said Mr. Brokaw, "and what teeth—and those eyes! Violet, I think." Then in his omniscient way, "That girl," he said, "is everything a young man imagines the girl he loves to be. She's an idealized sweetheart in the flesh."

"He'll rave for days," said Mrs. Brokaw, comfortably, "and I shall endure it without offering violence."

Presently the curtain descended for the intermission and the party consulted programs to discover the name of the girl around whose personality the entertainment had been builded.

"It fits," said Mr. Brokaw, jubilantly. "She couldn't have any other name. . . . Now, who do you suppose had the

genius to name her so! Nérée Caron! Can't you see that in electric lights on Forty-second Street?"

"Rococo, I'd call it," said Ellen Copeland.

"Um. . . ." Mr. Brokaw's eyes twinkled. "I don't know that I blame you altogether. But we'll be safe out of Quebec in twenty-four hours."

Donovan had been silent. In the discussion of the girl he had taken no part, and Mrs. Brokaw turned to him. "Are you so much in love, my boy, that all the rest of the world is drab and uninteresting?"

Donovan smiled, but, as always after his brief smile, his face became grave, pensive. "She has a look," he said.

"Without doubt," Mrs. Brokaw rejoined.

"As if," Donovan continued, "—as if you could check your life with her and find it safe and cared for when you returned."

"That," said Mrs. Brokaw, "is a compliment I would love to have had paid to me. I didn't know you had a flair for compliments."

"I was not complimenting her," said Donovan. "I think it is the truth."

"Then compliments are not the truth?"

Donovan's face lightened. "I think I should call them inflated currency," he said. "Generally the gold reserve is insufficient to redeem them."

The performance recommenced and proceeded to its conclusion; the audience surged from the theater and debouched upon the street. After some difficulty Donovan and Ted procured carriages for their party and rattled off toward the Château, where, presently, they were grouped about the entrance.

"I'm going straight to bed," declared Mrs. Brokaw. "This has been a long day for an old lady nearing her dotage."

"Ted and I," said Ellen Copeland, "are going for a little walk on the Terrace."

Mrs. Brokaw glanced at Donovan, but if he were disappointed or displeased, his face gave no sign. "And you, Nellie?" she said to Mrs. Loftus.

"I'm for bed, too," said that young lady.

"Then," said Mrs. Brokaw, "if you gentlemen will escort us to the elevator, you are dismissed for the evening."

Mr. Brokaw ascended with his wife and Mrs. Loftus, but Donovan remained. For a moment he strolled about the lobby and writing room of the hotel, passed out through the long shed of the carriage entrance, and stood facing the Champlain statue where it stood, dark and impressive, guarding the Place d'Armes. Presently, as if drawn by the silver beauty of the night, he moved slowly toward the guard railing of the Terrace at its northermost end and stood there immobile. Below him, blank and dark at the hour, lay the massive, grouped buildings of the Seminary and of Laval University—and still lower and more distant the lightless jumble of French Town bounded by the almost undiscernible ribbon of the St. Charles River. Dimly he could make out the breadth of the Grand Battery, that splendid section of drive perched upon the brow of the cliff, guarded by ancient cannon and still more ancient fortifications; and as he swept his eyes to the eastward over Lower Town to the vast, silver-gray indistinctness which was the river, Quebec seemed to him a city suspended by some magic in rarefied air. It was not a part of solid earth, but a place of dreams, of ancient dreams of dead days, lovely but melachonly. . . . Quebec is not so much a city as a memento—a *memento mori.* One cannot enter it and observe without receiving the force of the pensive reminder that the longest human life is but a flash in the night of the swift-moving ages—that it was but the other day when gentlemen from the court

of France stood where one stands to-day, gay with silks, truculent with long swords, sweeping the pavement with broad feathered hats—living, fighting, loving, coveting, struggling, blindly working out their unimportant destinies to give place to other destinies less picturesque but not less unimportant. . . .

Other thoughts than these were more healthful for a mind not given to cheerfulness. Donovan felt the weight and the melancholy of them and stood erect, throwing back his shoulders as if he would cast such reflections from him. There was beauty to see; there were glamourous thoughts to hold on such a spot—there were happiness, peace, trust to be found in the world. But in these things he could find no confidence; the highest reassurance he could obtain for himself was the reflection that life was brief, and, following, grief and joy and light and pain must be brief as well—brief and without consequence.

He moved slowly along the Terrace toward that higher granite eminence upon which squatted and frowned the old citadel whose walls of stone, whose moats, now dry, whose black dungeons had once heard the thunderous cannon crashes of armies gathered before America was a republic. . . . At last he reached that steep wooden stairway which leads upward and upward—in the darkness apparently without end or purpose—and began to climb. He had no destination, was as purposeless as the stairs himself. High above him reared the walls of that bastion to which has been given the name of the Prince of Wales in honor of a visit paid in another generation by the man who was to write his mark on the ledger page of the world as Edward Seventh. He ascended slowly, silently, until he stood at the top, and there he paused, for to his ear came the murmur of voices.

He listened, not deliberately, but as one whose attention is arrested by an unexpected sound. Clouds had concealed

the moon, and the frown of the old bastion rendered the spot one of impenetrable blackness; in the stillness the voices became distinct, though he could not discern the speakers.

"You don't think I *want* to marry him! . . . But I must eat! You can understand that—I must *eat!*"

"But I want you, Ellen! I want you. . . . I must have you."

"What's to prevent? We've gone over all that. The solemn fool I'm marrying won't be more watchful than your silly wife."

Donovan stepped forward once and stood—for at the instant the cloud swept past and the faery silver of the moon disclosed sharply the two who stood beneath the walls. . . . They did not see him, and he, bewildered by the suddenness of it all, was frozen in numb motionlessness. He felt as if some long garment in which he had been draped from head to toe had parted and was slipping from him. The sensation was as distinctly physical as if the thing were happening. Something dropped from him; he emerged from some sort of wrapping. . . .

Ted and Ellen! The woman he loved and the friend to whom he had given his friendship! His promised wife, a month before their marriage already betraying him, planning with cool, cynical callousness to break the vows which would bind her to him! . . . His father, his mother—every living soul he had loved and trusted—and now his wife and his friend—all had deceived him, all been traitors to his faith and to his love. . . . He had been born into a world of cheats where love and honor were but words to dangle before the eyes of fools and children. . . . This was life! This was the experience about which men and women prated. This was knowing the world. . . . Of a sudden Donovan felt that he knew the world, that it had no further secret to give up to his knowledge. The riddle of life stood before him stark, limned in fire, dis-

tinct, clear-cut in every line and figure. . . . Singularly enough, his sensation for a moment was not rage, not despair, but *wisdom*. He felt as if he knew everything, as if he were the possessor of the sum total of the collected wisdom of the ages.

Then a chill fell upon him, not the chill of weakness, of breaking under strain, but the chill of steel. There was an element of detachment in it, as if he were not Donovan Steele, as if, in reality, he were no human being at all but a mere mass of clear cold thought.

Again he stepped forward, a long, swift step, and impended over the girl and the man who had dealt the final, killing blow to the boy who had been Donovan Steele. They were aware of him as they stood, Ellen within the arms of Ted Loftus, and she gave back with a little cry—not so much of fright as of chagrin. . . . Donovan seized each by the shoulder, wrenching them apart. Ellen reeled toward the harshness of the granite wall; Ted strove to assume a posture of defense, as if fearing further offensive. But Donovan became motionless again, and when he spoke it was with a voice cold as glacial ice, dangerous as sharpened and tempered steel.

"Get out of here—quickly," he said.

"Donovan—"

"Be still."

"Look here—"

"Quick!" said Donovan, and his voice tingled like a wire being drawn to over-tautness. He, always so grave, always gentle, deferential to women, strode to Ellen's side, seized her roughly, and pushed her stumbling toward Loftus. "Get her out of my sight," he said.

They went, and they went silently and in fear, for there was that about Donovan Steele, a hint of newly awakened eager *cruelty*, a chill ruthlessness which laid its touch upon them and compelled them. . . . Donovan did not watch them

go. He walked to the railing and peered down into the shadowed depths of Lower Town, peered with eyes which saw nothing of actualities, but which gazed into a gulf of blackness, of hatred, of despair. . . .

Presently he raised his face aloft and sneered; out of his dreadful loneliness, out of his new-born hatred for man, out of his woe and scorn and the death agony of his youth, he addressed the Ruler of the Universe—addressed him with curling lip and scornful eye.

"You say you created man in your own image," he said. "I understand that now—the most shameful confession since eternity began."

For a moment he gazed upward; then he wavered, the erectness of his body departed from it and he sagged in every muscle and joint. Half a dozen times he staggered up and down the level space which had witnessed his tragedy, weaving, wavering upon his feet, and once he laughed and once he cursed. . . . It was the death agony of the entity who had been Donovan Steele. . . . Then, with working face and eyes from which reason had vanished, he rushed headlong down the long stairs to the Terrace and, muttering and mouthing drunkenly, started for some destination—some distant, hazy, not defined destination, he knew not what nor whither.

Hatless, disheveled, he made his headlong progress through darkened, deserted streets, down steep, cobbled declivities, into and out of cul-de-sacs—blindly, without reason, a man drunken with hatred, disillusion, scorn. The lightless maze of Lower Town did not bewilder him, for he was unconscious of it; all he knew was to plunge on and on and on hopelessly. . . .

Of a sudden there was an interruption; something was battering upon his consciousness—a voice. What did he care for voices? . . . It repeated itself insistently, pitifully:

"Please . . . please wait! . . . Oh, please!"

There was something humorous about it, he found, and he chuckled. Then it repeated itself in French:

"Monsieur, attendez! Oh, pour l'amour de Dieu, attendez!"

The idea of waiting for somebody for the love of God tickled his distorted fancy, and he slackened his steps until a hand touched his arm and a breathless voice, a girl's voice, addressed him in the French of the motherland.

"Oh, monsieur, you must aid me! . . . I have fear, it is so dark. . . . I must leave the city. . . . For the love of God, monsieur, will you not protect me!"

They were at the point where Little Champlain Street debouches upon the wharves, and the darkness was less impenetrable. Donovan stopped and sneered down at the girl. . . . Here was humor for you—a human being demanding succor of *him!* . . . The girl's face was dimly visible. It was familiar; he had seen it before. And then he laughed aloud. It was the lovely girl of the show, the light-hearted care-free dancer—the flame among blades of grass. . . . And she, who had been the very symbol of lightness and happiness, was here, distressed, terrified, demanding help of him. . . . It was droll. He laughed again, harshly.

She looked up into his eyes piteously. "You will—you will help me," she said.

"Nérée Caron," he said, jeeringly. "Nérée Caron. . . ."

She uttered a little cry of terror. "You know me! . . . Who are you? . . . Oh, if you know me, then you will help me."

"Dance," he said. "Dance and sing and lie and deceive. Go on. I'll watch you."

"Oh, sir . . . there's no time to waste! . . .

"So it's got you, too, eh?" His voice was harsh. "It's

broken your lantern and stopped your dance. . . . And you want me to help you. To help you to what?"

"To leave this city—to leave it quickly and unseen. . . . See, I trust you. . . ."

"Trust!" he said, wildly, and laughed again.

She came closer to him and touched his arm appealingly. He snarled and pushed her away as if her fingers upon his clothing were a defilement. "Don't do that," he said, and drew his arm away from her nearness with his other hand. For a moment he stood impassive, sneering down into the clouded loveliness of her face. "You don't know," he said, "what a joke it is for anybody to ask help of *me*. A human being—especially a woman—coming to *me* for help!" Then, suddenly, he reached out and seized her shoulder, swinging her about so that her face was toward the luminous grayness of the St. Lawrence. "There's the river," he said. "If you're in trouble, take it to the river. . . . By all means try the river."

And so he turned away from her and continued on his devious, staggering way. And she, Nérée Caron, lately so beautiful and desired, lately smiling with vivid life upon thunders of applause, the favorite child of happiness and gayety, was left alone in the darkness, trembling with terror, abandoned by her last desperate hope, with no other resource in the world than those which lay within her own frail self . . . with no other resource, if one omits her devout faith in the mercy and solicitude of a God who sees not even a sparrow fall. . . .

Chapter Three

How many days or how many weeks later it was when Donovan Steele awoke he could not have told, although ages seemed to have passed, dim, convulsive, troubled ages. He lay with closed eyes, fearing to open them and let in the pain of sunlight, for he was ill, not with the illness which brings death, but with that peculiar illness which brings remorse and resolutions never to do so again. As he lay with closed eyes he sought to remember, to pick up the stitches which had unraveled behind him, but there was nothing but a jumble of murky scenes, a confusion of obscure events which fitted together in no degree whatsoever. . . . And he was very miserable. In addition to being miserable he was stiff and uncomfortable. For a time he was little more than semi-conscious—in that state where one hopes he will not awake fully, but will drowse off again, to awake later refreshed and struggling to recall the details of an exceptionally unpleasant nightmare.

But he could not sleep again. He twisted his head, and his cheek rubbed some surface, rough, hard, unpleasant. He felt it with his hand: it was the unplaned surface of a timber. For another little while he lay working his stiff and aching neck from side to side before he cautiously opened his eyes. Now he sat up, sick and dizzy, and held his throbbing head in cupped hands. It seemed to him he would have sold his soul for a cup of water to drink and enough more to pour coolingly over his head and shoulders.

Presently he opened his eyes again and looked down at his feet. They startled him, for they were not his feet at all, not by any means; they were feet such as he had seen at the end

of the legs of members of the down-and-out brotherhood adjacent to cheap lodging houses on city water fronts. Where he had worn neat tan ties when last he noticed his feet, he now found them incased in huge, cracked unblacked, down-at-heel shoes. Next he took stock of his trousers, and found them such as he would not have touched with his cane in other days. . . . When a man is in doubt as to his personal appearance his hand usually goes to his tie. Donovan wore no tie, and if he wore a shirt at all it was guiltless of a collar. It was not nice. He reflected that if his tie had vanished, his pearl pin undoubtedly had vanished with it, and this impelled him to reach for his watch. There was no watch.

These discoveries shocked him somewhat, but were unable to bring him altogether to himself. He looked about him, and the place was strange. He found himself to be sitting on a pile of great timbers in a sort of park, a park with graveled walks and inclosed on the side toward which he looked with a high stone-and-iron barrier beyond which upreared a steep hillside. He turned his head and saw before him an area of ruin, a great stretch of tumbled stone and of charred, smoke-stained well. Apparently there had been a fire. Over at his left was a building of frame, very large but obviously temporary. It was a church. This was very puzzling, but it became even more incomprehensible when a black-robed figure wearing a derby hat turned in through the wide gateway and came toward him. It was a brother of some religious order, Donovan perceived, but of what order or in what place he had no remotest idea. The brother saw him, paused uncertainly a moment, and walked across the graveled plaza to him.

Donovan let his head fall again on his hands; he was in no mood to be accosted, had no wish for companionship even of the briefest. He felt no curiosity as to his whereabouts and very little about his recent movements. Something had happened,

he knew—something which he would remember presently—which had tip-tilted the world he had inhabited and sent him spinning off into space. . . . At the moment his need was water, cooling water, but, somehow, he wanted to find it himself, fetch it himself, accepting aid from none.

"Good day, my son!" said the brother, pausing before Donovan and regarding him with interest. He spoke in the language of France, but that did not surprise or interest Donovan, who neither looked up nor replied. The brother, a grizzled old man with humorous eyes and a face which might well have been Irish instead of Gallic, scratched his chin.

"I hope you have slept well," he said, "though, myself, I would have chosen another mattress. Are you seeking work?"

"No," said Donovan in a forbidding voice.

"Doubtless," said the brother, "you are making a pilgrimage."

"Yes," said Donovan, and suddenly he remembered, remembered what it was that had careened his world, "on a pilgrimage to the devil."

"Then," said the brother, "you have gone astray. You will not find him here. We are at some pains to keep him at a distance."

Donovan grunted. "Don't gabble," he said, roughly, "but show me water."

"And after you have had water—you will then continue your pilgrimage to the devil?"

"If it suits me," said Donovan.

"If," said the brother, with a twinkle in his eye, "the discrepancy between your diction and your appearance be an indication, you have made notable progress toward your destination."

"My diction and my appearance are my own affair. Do I get water or not?"

"But certainly, my son." He chuckled. "I was thinking," he said, explanatorily, "that yours is the first pilgrimage of its precise character which has ever reached our doors. On the train presently to arrive comes the pilgrims from the Parish St. Famille. Is it not droll that a pilgrimage to the devil and one to Ste. Anne should arrive at a common halting place?"

Donovan frowned. "I am in Sainte Anne de Beaupré?" he asked.

"It enfolds you," said the brother.

Donovan laughed harshly. "Where the sick are made well and the lame to walk," he said, sneeringly. "Where men and women come, expecting miracles of kindness from a God who does not exist—or if he does exist, who takes his pleasure in the fraud?"

"Men have spoken of this place as a fraud," said the brother, serenely. "Also men have denied God and the roundness of the world and that the sun rises in the east." He paused and scrutinized Donovan, not twinklingly now, but gravely, without resentment. "It is evident you have a grievance against Heaven," he said.

"If," said Donovan, "you are as free with your miracles as with your water—"

"Ah, pardon, my son! An old man's tongue! But come and you shall have water—and afterward—we shall see. We shall see. Perhaps a cup of coffee, eh? And bacon striped with lean if the stomach be in the mood for it. . . . Eh! Eh! Now you present a parallel in your own person, my son. Regard yourself. Doubtless you have a grievance against your stomach at this moment, as well as against Heaven. But see you, your poor stomach is but striving for your benefit to battle against the evil you yourself have poured into it. . . . Come, first the water."

"I will pay for food," said Donovan, reaching an unsteady hand into his pocket, but withdrawing it again empty. Here was an unpleasantness. The pocket was empty. He was penniless. The brother regarded him with interest. "I shall not eat," said Donovan.

"And why?"

"Because," said Donovan, "I will accept from no man, nor be indebted to any human being. From this day I shall take, and what I cannot take I shall go without." It was not as if he uttered this in answer to the question, but as if he were expressing himself to himself, stating a position, laying down a rule for his own guidance.

"You speak of receiving—of taking," said the brother. "What about giving, my son? Is it not more blessed to give than to receive?"

"A precept," said Donovan, "invented by beggars and cheats."

"I myself have known it to be misused at times—yet—"

"Catch phrases," said Donovan. "All religion is built on a foundation of them; all government rests on them. It is a world run by catch phrases—sounding lies to gouge the credulous and command the obedience of the ignorant. List them, listen to them." He laughed harshly. Love they neighbor as thyself. . . . Better to give than receive. . . . Blessed are the meek. . . . Give one's life for one's country. . . . No. The old Hebrews did better with their eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth."

Donovan's companion was silent a moment, reflecting, appraising. He was saying to himself, "This young man is very young and he has been bruised. It is making him talk rashly. That is well. So long as he talks rashly he will not act rashly, only foolishly. The thing may talk itself out. . . . No, I judge it not dangerous to-day; but if to-morrow he

become silent, then the matter will wear another face. It is not the bursting boil one fears, but the silent, unsuspected malignant growth." He lifted his eyes to Donovan's face.

"Some of those—ah—catch phrases," he said, "were uttered by the Blessed Jesus." It was not a rebuke, but the placid statement of an historic fact. "He not only uttered them, my son, but set the example by performing them, until, in the end, he gave the Great Gift. Was it not well that he should have died for all mankind?"

"Granting," said Donovan, "that he did—and was not executed by his government in the ordinary course of business—then he himself was bamboozled by a catch phrase. . . . Besides, he was betrayed, was he not?—by one he loved and trusted."

"Ah," said the brother to himself, "now we are close to the mark."

A bucket of water set forth in the shade for the laborers who cleared the ruins was at their feet. Donovan drank thirstily, and, when he had drunk his fill, lifted the pail and poured what remained of its contents over his throbbing head.

"You have left none for the others," said the brother, experimentally.

"That," said Donovan, "is their lookout."

"Now," said the brother, "your breakfast."

"No."

"You will not accept food?"

"No."

"What then, my son? One must eat to live."

"I shall live," said Donovan, and again the brother regarded him, for a new note had come into his voice, a cold, hard note which was not good to hear.

"Will you buy food with labor?"

Donovan's eyes narrowed as he considered briefly. . . .

Here was a new life which he must commence. The old life, the old Donovan Steele, were dead. There must be a beginning somewhere, and why not as a laborer in the ruins of the great basilica of Ste. Anne de Beaupré?

"For wages," he said.

"Many," said the brother, "give their day's work for the love of Sainte Anne."

"I give nothing for love of anyone," Donovan replied.

"For wages, then," said the brother. "And now we shall advance the payment of a meal."

"No," said Donovan.

"You will not eat?"

"I accept no favors. To-night I shall come to you for my wages. Then I shall buy food."

And that was almost the last word Brother Bruno heard the young man speak, though Donovan worked in that inclosure as a common laborer until the week was ended. Silence fell upon him, the silence Brother Bruno had apprehended. Youth and rash words were no more. He was very still, very intent. . . . Through that long day he worked without food, and more than once Brother Bruno stepped that way to regard him, to determine if he did not weaken. The brother would have taken it as a favorable sign had Donovan given in and asked for bread.

During the noon hour he sat, his back against an ashlar of the old church, and brooded. None spoke to him nor did he lift his eyes to look at any. Before the door of the temporary church a line of younger brothers of the Redemptorist Order, which has in its keeping the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, gathered to chat and joke with lounging workmen in an intimacy of good-fellowship. More than one of them essayed to demonstrate that the black robe covered as good a man as the

homespun shirt, and with laughter and boyish delight back after back strained and muscles cracked when brothers bent over a huge timber to prove how they could lift so great a weight. The little friendly group did not interest Donovan. He did not see it. His head was better now, nausea was gone, and he was his own man again, planning for the future. His plans were not altruistic.

At the end of the day's work he presented himself to Brother Bruno.

"My wages," he said, shortly.

"You are hungry?" asked the brother.

"What is that to you?"

"My day," said Brother Bruno, gravely, "would have been spent in greater ease of mind had I not reflected upon your empty stomach."

Donovan made no reply, but, thrusting the coins in his pocket, hastened down the road to one of the many places of refreshment, where he spent the greater part of his substance in a full meal.

That night he slept under a shed. Four more days he labored, each night demanding and receiving his wage, but on Sunday morning he was gone, and, though Brother Bruno spent a deal of his leisure that day—and it was little enough, in truth, for pilgrims came in throngs—in searching for and asking of the young man, he was not to be found, nor was there any who saw him go.

"He will find himself," said Brother Broun, "for he is strong. The strength was to be perceived in him. . . . But when he has found himself, what will he have found? Ah, that is the question. His silence was not good, nor was it good the manner in which he went from one spot to another, forcing all to turn out of his path. I liked it not." He sighed and said a prayer to the good Ste. Anne in Donovan's behalf,

which, it is clear, was all that remained to him in the way of aid. But often, in the days which followed, Brother Bruno thought of Donovan Steele and wondered from what wound he suffered, and reflected upon the punishment meet for those whose wickedness had done the inflicting.

Chapter *Four*

THERE exists no record of the movements of Donovan Steele for the succeeding week or more, but that he walked away from Ste. Anne de Beaupré in the darkness seems certain. None saw him go, and amid such a simple population with its kindly curiosity, it is impossible his departure had not been marked if the inhabitants had been abroad. Inasmuch as he became a figure in those parts, almost lengendary in his proportions, efforts have been made to trace his goings and his comings. About winter firesides *habitants* varied their tales of the *loup garou* and the *Chassé Galerie* with tales of the doings of this young man, and, doubtless, in another generation he will have arisen to the dignity of a place in their folklore.

Even after this short lapse of time he has been endowed with certain qualities which savor of the malign supernatural; quite impossible and astonishing stories are related with a firm confidence in their veracity, and mothers in remote parishes have been known to make use of his name in disciplining their children. If you do not credit this, suppose you take boat to Tadousac or train to the Roberval district, or visit Ha! Ha! Bay where the great pulp mills are, or go back to La Chute—but there he is better known and feared for himself and for what he was rather than for any devil-possession with which legend has credited him.

Throughout the vast, illimitable reaches of mountain and forest to the northward of the great river you will hear him named, not by the name he received at his christening, but by that other which he earned by his conduct. Some men require a score of years to earn a name, and some men never exhibit enough of strength of weakness, good or evil, to warrant the

affixing of an appellation. Donovan Steele accomplished the thing in a summer and a winter, and his fame, which was not a pleasant fame at all, spread by word of mouth and neighborly gossip over a region great in extent as the Roman Empire.

Suppose a child, driven by a passion for mud pies, should play in the heavy spring roads to the ruination of his neat clothes and against the express command of his mother. You might hear her stand in her doorway, or hard by the huge, humpbacked oven at the side of the house, as she called to him:

"Look you, Jean, who knows but Le Malcœur comes down this road to-day. Eh, well? How would you make then? Think you he would turn out or pass around you? *Par example!* But no. He would trample you and pass on as if you had not been."

Whereat the child, flinging his mud pies from him, would rush into the shelter of the farmyard and cower. This you may hear and may verify with ease.

Le Malcœur. So the *habitants* and the lumberjacks and the pulp-choppers named him. The Bad Heart. So they named him for cause, and men who had not seen him hoped secretly in their hearts that an encounter with him might never take place. It appears to be true that it is not strength or temper or the character of a bully, or the reputation of hunger for fighting which creates fear of the sort to make men turn aside and seek to avoid. It is ruthlessness.

If you wish to be let alone, or to have men turn the other cheek, erect about yourself an appearance of ruthlessness, and the thing is done. Few, even of your tough fighters, relish an affair *à l'outrance.* All prefer to try conclusions with an antagonist who, in victory, will stop short of his possible worst. But given a man known to stop at nothing, in whom pity is lacking, who is utterly ruthless, and you have one who

will seldom be challenged. . . . And this was the reputation borne by Donovan Steele.

But all this was as yet unborn when Donovan went away from Ste. Anne de Beaupré, so none were exercised to watch in order that they might later narrate.

It is certain that he trudged some distance eastward along the river, doubtless on the right of way of the railroad, passing through that region of narrow farms, each running down to the river, whose fences are so close together that they resemble the threads in a fringe. It was May, and, had his eyes been invited to the country through which he passed, he would have seen little ravines filled with belated snow. Farther on, as the flat shelf of farmland gave way to abrupt cliffs and mountain faces of Laurentian granite, he might have delighted in a multitude of faery waterfalls, later to disappear when the melting of the snow was accomplished—waterfalls which seemed rather to float downward, filmy, unrolling ribbons of whitest lace, than to fall with a rush and a roar. It was a countryside of waterfalls, scores of them, hundreds of them, and not one but was worthy of a pause and a moment's admiration. . . . Waterfalls and mountains to the left, and the broad, gray river across which the eye could hardly reach to the right. . . . Toward evening, the army of porpoises, close inshore, turning and curveting like so many war horses of the maritime gods! It seemed the cavalry of the sea must there have rendezvoused for spring maneuvers, in such a multitude were they. . . . It is to be doubted if Donovan Steele saw mountain or waterfall or river or porpoise army. He was looking inward upon himself and saw only darkness.

Where, in the beginning, had been only turmoil, confusion, a delirium following shock, now there was clarity, calculation—a cold, transparent sharpness which made the world and all that was in it appear in abrupt profile, wire edged. Only

one emotion stirred in him now, a chill, resistless current of hatred, of hatred for everything that lived—and included in his hatred was himself.

That he worked along the way is certain, and that personal pride or self-respect had not been destroyed is testified to by his altered appearance some days later. It seems he had purchased a razor, and that, one by one, as he could afford the expenditure, he had replaced the outrageous garments worn by him on his awakening on the pile of timbers at Ste. Anne de Beaupré. It would not have been difficult now to mistake his broad-shouldered young figure for that of a lumberjack on his way to the workings. He presented a complete metamorphosis from the carefully groomed, gentle-eyed, silent young gentleman who had come as a tourist to Quebec but a few days before. In everything he was another man—even in the essential of having discovered what it was to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. His hands were hardening.

The apochrypha of his wanderings becomes history again on a day when he boarded a train at a little station midway between Quebec and La Malbaie. It would seem that he had acquired a vague destination—not a spot, not a village, but a locality, and La Malbaie lay at the center of this. . . . In the crowded, odorous smoking compartment at the end of the lurching day coach, Donovan encountered Cluny.

It takes but three words to make the bare statement, but much hard writing would be required to tell the half of what came of it. Donovan encountered Cluny!

The young man entered the smoking compartment unconscious or unmindful of the eyes upturned to regard him, and seated himself in a corner. A brief silence fell, as is always the case when a stranger becomes one of a small group; then the talk commenced again as Donovan filled and lighted his pipe—Donovan, whose cigarettes had always been made for

him especially. He smoked and stared out of the window, nor did more than fragments of the animated, vivid talk penetrate to his consciousness. It was French he heard, of course, that Canadian French which friends defend and foes deride, which is not the French of the boulevards and which is as full of archaic words as the vocabulary of a Kentucky mountaineer. In the solitudes new words are not invented readily to displace the old; terms persist which have passed into desuetude where life is more complicated and hurried. Here one may hear used in casual conversation words which have not been common or usual since the days of Champlain. . . .

Across from Donovan and knee to knee with him sat a man in ill-fitting black, obviously his best. It was a huge suit of clothes, but, nevertheless, not quite ample for the proportions they covered but did not adorn. A watch chain, which a child could not have lifted without effort, hung across a vast stomach. Gigantic legs were far spread to accommodate the great, egg-shaped paunch. Gargantuan, square-toed shoes gave ease to a pair of feet which might well arouse astonishment and admiration, and on top of all was a carefully brushed derby hat which seemed too small and quite too dressy to be the real property of the man who wore it.

You could not have been certain at first, or, indeed, after some acquaintance, whether or not you liked the face. It was not because there was so much of it, but because it was a baffling face, a remarkable face, an arresting face. It was not so much a homogenous countenance as a collection of enormous features carelessly assembled, and of these features the nose was the one upon which one's consideration fixed itself. It was literally a handful of nose. Somehow it made one think of a clumsy handle set there to be grasped when one wanted to turn the head from side to side—an elongated, bulbous door knob. It jutted out like a promontory, swelling toward the

end and bulging and folding over the nostrils. Tracts of bronze cheek reached off to either side of this landmark, passing downward without interruption into a neck as large around as a powerful man's thigh. A stiff collar, somewhat soiled, cut into this, and was lost to view under the quantity of flesh which formed the under-structure of the chin. His mouth had to be enormous, but it was also mobile and expressive, and the white teeth did not seem to be human teeth so much as a row of polished bowlders. If you expected small eyes concealed in rolls of flesh, you would have been disappointed. The eyes were big, too, big and clear and blue and lively—and enigmatic. A regular forest of eyebrows, sprouting from bulging brows, overhung them. But—and here was the surprising thing—the man did not impress you as being fat, and the idea of grossness was unthinkable in connection with him. . . . No, he was simply huge—huge and puzzling.

This was Cluny.

He was interested in everything, in every word, and there was an astonishing alertness about him, something quick, and, absurd as it may sound, sparrow-like in his movements. It seemed as if he could not bear to miss a word or overlook the most fleeting expression of any of his companions. It was plain, too, that he was interested in Donovan, for he glanced at him sharply, appraisingly, every now and then and seemed to be awaiting a break in the chatter to address some remark to him. . . . As for Donovan, he had not looked into the face of a man in the compartment.

Snatches of conversation beat futilely against Donovan's ears—of fragments now and then he became half conscious. It was evident the travelers were discussing a nine days' wonder.

". . . It is said she was very beautiful. . . ."

"Of a truth. I have read she had the age of twenty years."

"But so wicked, eh? . . . And then to vanish, oh, to vanish utterly!" The speaker lowered his voice and hinted at an unspeakable think: "The devil——" he said.

"Aha!" said Cluny in a voice of mingled satisfaction and interest, "we now have the devil, eh? Sacred name of a pipe! And this devil, regard you, lifted her up and flew away with her, without a doubt."

"Without a doubt," said the first speaker, now wedded to his theory. "It is well known there are evil spirits——"

"Of which this girl was one?" asked Cluny.

"But certainly."

The great man shrugged his shoulders. *"Vraiment!* Who knows!"

"Ah, but," demanded the theorist, "are not evil spirits beautiful—made so for the damnation of men's souls? And could one not of the devil kill a child, her own brother, attend you?"

"With poison in little candies?" added a third.

"It is a story to tell at home," said another. "The Fort, from river to river, agitates itself with the story."

Cluny held them with his eye while he prepared to make a statement. They waited.

"It is my belief," he said at last, "that the devil invented money to save the trouble of fashioning evil spirits. Of a truth, gold is more reliable for the purpose."

"There are evil spirits," said the other, stubbornly.

"Now, my friend," Cluny said, "I ask you this. If there be a bridge across a river, would you, disregarding it, plunge into the water and swim across?"

"But no."

"Think you, then, the devil has less brains than you?"

"Ah!"

"He has to his hand men and women and money. Either

of the latter two may be depended upon to send the first to his damnation. Is it not so?"

"There are good women."

"Of a truth, and there is good money—but either, like a tame wolf, may turn and bite you." Cluny laughed until his vast bulk quivered.

"See," said a fourth speaker, "I have it all here in the journal of Quebec, set down in print. It is all told from beginning to end."

"But which," said another, "you cannot read."

"*C'est vrai,*" said the first, simply, "but I carry it to the priest of our parish, and the village shall gather in his house while he reads and also explains. Then doubtless we shall have the truth of the matter, which so puzzles these lawyers and policemen at the Fort."

"Think you she was a changeling?" asked another. "Ah, to think of it! Now, as to the matter of changelings—the half-sister of my wife's grandmother—"

"Can changelings pass locked doors and make themselves invisible?" asked another, with the air of one asking enlightenment on a point of obscure natural history.

"The changeling of the half-sister of my wife's grandmother—" began the first speaker. But Cluny interrupted again:

"Now, regard the facts of this matter. Here we have a boy of twelve years and a girl of twenty. Neither father nor mother remains to them—but a great fortune of two millions of dollars in banks and in lands and in timber and in other things. . . . There is also a third person, a good man, so reports say, regarded highly in the city of Montreal, and trustworthy. This man is brother of the father of the two, and it is he who is intrusted with their care and with the care of the great fortune. . . . All this is clear. But also,

in the inquiries made and disclosed, it is shown that this twelve-year-old boy regarded his sister with hatred, and this is a strange matter and not natural. How could such a thing be, and why? It is a point to be scrutinized closely, *n'est pas?*"

"Truly," agreed the smoking compartment.

"Again, . . . if there was not friendship between brother and sister, how came he in Quebec—to be with her and on the spot where the poisoned candies caused his death? Tell me that, you. For he died in the theater where his sister danced, and not only in the theater, but in the very room in which she dressed. It was there, on the floor, that his body was found. . . . How came he there?"

"It is a mystery," said the man who held to the theory of satanic possession.

"Now," continued Cluny, "as all must admit—if this sister poisoned her brother—it was that she might possess all of the wealth instead of a half."

"True."

Cluny smiled and prepared to clinch his argument. "The devil is very wise and skillful," he offered.

The smoking compartment crossed itself.

"And he lends of his wisdom and his adroitness to his evil spirits?"

"Doubtless."

"Then," said Cluny, "this girl must have been an imbecile evil spirit, and as there exist no records of imbecile evil spirits, I hold she was nothing but mortal. . . . For, look you, as the deed was done, how could she hope to profit by it? . . . No. To my thinking this proves she was a woman only, for woman, in anger or in love, act first and think, if they think at all, afterward. . . . I have known women," said Cluny, with great appearance of wisdom, "and all the thinking I have seen them do is by way of regrets."

Suddenly, and Cluny had a sudden way with him for all his bulk, he leaned forward and touched Donovan on the knee. While he talked he had reached a conclusion about the young man, and its correctness may be gauged by the fact that he addressed Donovan in English.

"Looking for a job?" he asked.

Donovan looked into his eyes bleakly. "Who are you?" he asked, forbiddingly.

"I am Cluny."

"Well, Cluny," said Donovan, "suppose you attend to your own affairs."

The rebuff might have been a blank cartridge, for all its effect.

"My affair is to hire men," he said. "Do you want a job?"

"What job?"

"I'm woods boss yonder."

Donovan studied him a moment. "Um . . ." he said; "it may be your job I want. If I do I shall take it."

"If you can get it," said Cluny, "you're welcome." He stood up, and his bulk seemed to fill the room. Sitting, Cluny seemed a tremendously fleshy man; standing, the appearance of fleshiness was not there, it vanished, leaving only the impression of hugeness, enormous physical power. "Do you think you can take it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Donovan.

"You'll find the office at Saint Fidèle," said Cluny, and his eyes bore an expression of great pleasure.

"I'll come," said Donovan.

After that Cluny did not so much as glance at Donovan again, nor did Donovan seem aware of Cluny's presence. But the active thoughts which clicked away in the back of the huge man's mind were busied with the boy, weighing him,

judging him, and working toward a characteristic Cluny conclusion. It was this:

"We'll see," said Cluny to himself. "If he comes to Saint Fidèle we'll find if he is what he thinks he is." His eyes glowed with anticipation. . . . The train slowed at La Malbaie, its terminal, and the passengers descended into a babel of importunate *charetiers*.

"I'll be waiting for you," Cluny said over his shoulder to Donovan.

Donovan contented himself with a nod of the head. It was a challenge offered and accepted. . . .

Chapter *Five*

To reach the parish of Ste. Agnès one must travel a number of miles, preferably behind a horse if regard is had for the springs of one's motor. But what is more important is that one must travel a number of decades in time, and that crabwise. The miles driven up the Murray River, past the pulp mills at La Chute, and almost to the shores of Perir Lac, are lovely enough to warrant one in going to so much trouble for that pleasure alone. Dark, wooded mountains lift and hover in the distance with their suggestion of vast solitudes and loneliness and the grimness of a winter not long past. Tip-tilted farms clamber about on either hand, and cattle and sheep, whose definition of a pasture is doubtless a bit of land set on edge, busy themselves with their predestined occupation of creating beef and mutton and wool. One or perhaps two droll carriages may be met joyously carrying the *habitant* and his family—or his sweetheart—to the metropolis of La Malbaie. Now and then something bright dangles from a fence at the farmhouse door, and this, curiosity discloses, is a hank of yarn fresh from the dye, drying in the cool wind. . . . Which brings us to the element of time, for Ste. Agnès is a parish where the spinning-wheel whirs and the clackety-clack of the loom may be heard from any open window; where the trousers worn by the plowmen were carded and spun and woven by his wife; and where may be found the most excellent homespun fabrics afforded by a forward-looking and mechanical world. There are people of mature years in Ste. Agnès who have never seen a motion picture, and others who have never ridden in an automobile, which is a condition making for contentment and a certain admirable placidity of life.

MIRACLE

It is worth a journey from New York to Ste. Agnès that it may be borne in upon one what a satisfactory and pleasant world has been despoiled by modern inventions.

Southwest of Ste. Agnès lies the parish of St. Irénée, but the roads in that direction are less frequently traveled, and that without doubt was the reason a young woman chose them for her journey on the day Donovan Steele arrived in La Malbaie.

She had walked inland from the river. While the mists still concealed the shores she had stepped to land from one of those quaint sailing craft which are so abundant from Quebec eastward—sturdy craft of heavy planking constructed for the exigencies of the wide river, and choosing for their rig that of the schooner, the sloop, the ketch, or the yawl. No pleasure craft are these, but beasts of burden carrying leisurely cargoes of baled hay or of pulp bolts or of supplies for the lumber camps. Seaworthy craft they are and worthy of a gayer career.

In everything she was a daughter of a *fermier* of the region, from droll hat to heavy shoes and homespun skirt, but if one had tipped up her chin and peered at her face he must have scouted the idea of peasant forbears, or marveled that such a flower could have grown in a kitchen garden. Had he eyes capable of recognition he would have known another emotion than surprise, for the bonnet hid the face of Nérée Caron!

It was a wan and woeful face, pale and bereft of that piquant vividness which had been more bewitching than its mere beauty of feature. It was a haunted little face, but not a lost, defeated face. Courage sat there, and determination. She walked with intention, rapidly, as one who proceeds to a known destination with urgency.

The first bewilderment following unspeakable tragedy had passed, and with it the terror, that unendurable terror which had seized her there in her little dressing room in the Quebec

theater. Again and again she strove to recall all the harrowing circumstances, but, strangely enough, the thing she remembered most vividly was something which had not occurred. All her remembering of those few terrible minutes was interwoven, almost obscured, by a piercing shriek, which even now tortured her ears when her thoughts turned backward. That scream was distinct, awful. It had sounded wrenching, quavering—and it had burst from her own lips. It had torn her throat, lacerated her. With it had seemed to burst from her life itself. . . . And yet that scream had never been uttered. It was a thing imagined, for she had stood stockstill, perfectly silent!

She could think of it almost calmly after this lapse of days, weighing the thing, searching it, scrutinizing it for hidden hopeful elements. It had all happened in minutes, almost in seconds. That so much could have crowded itself into that minute space seemed impossible—that she, Nérée Caron could have been hurled headlong out of the life it had taken her twenty years to build. It had been, for the most part, a lovely life, a life of adorations. True, fear resided in it, questionings, suspicions. There had been sorrow, too, and sincere, faithful effort—effort to overcome and dissipate what she was unable to understand. The aversion of her small brother had been fruitful in unhappiness, incomprehensible as it was. Often and often she had blamed herself for her dislike of her father's brother, her guardian. It had seemed causeless, for always he dealt with her in a manner courteous and considerate. Perhaps there was too much courtesy and consideration, worn as a flowing outer garment, a robe, to conceal clothing of quite a different nature underneath. She had felt the oppression of him, fear of him. Vaguely she felt that he was not her friend and that there was malignity in his secret thoughts.

Now she knew!

She knew that for years, from his infancy, her guardian, by every makeshift known to saturnine ingenuity, had turned her brother against her. It is easy to impress the mind of a child, especially easy if one spoil the child, indulge him, build oneself before the childish eyes as the source of easy benefits. It had been a plan, conceived in cupidity, elaborated with malignant thoroughness, carried to fruition with the ruthlessness which one associates only with the mentally deranged. Yet her uncle was not mentally deranged, unless to possess a mind of consummate evil were insanity.

As she trudged along indomitably she unrolled again the scroll of those minutes in the stuffy dressing room, of her return from the stage, elated by the plaudits of a delighted audience and bearing in her arms such a burden of flowers as testified to its sincerity. She opened the door, and with that simple action joy and hope and light were obliterated. Her brother stood in the room.

"Paul!" she said, and stopped.

The boy, a child who might grow to be a man of distinction, maliciously.

"What are you doing here? Who brought you? Why are you in Quebec?" She asked the questions rapidly, with some severity, for she thought him safely at home in Montreal.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," he said in English.

And then it happened.

"There it is," he said, pouncing in his spoiled way upon a package upon the table.

"Paul!"

"Stingy!" he jeered, and tore off the wrapper. With greedy fingers he stuffed a morsel into his mouth—and that was the end. His eyes stared, he seemed to stiffen, to rise on his toes,

and then he fell at her feet—and she detected very faintly the odor of bitter almonds.

Nérée flung herself forward, lifted the child's head, and then it was she fancied she shrieked, for he was dead.

And then, for she was a child, unhardened by vicissitudes, and face to face with her first great emergency, she knew panic—a dreadful, benumbing fear of the unknown. It had flashed into her brain that her brother's death was accident—that the poisoned candy was meant for her. Poison! . . . Somehow it required no effort of reason to inform her of that. She knew. Poison had killed her brother Paul.

She cowered there at her brother's head, forgetful in that moment even of the solicitude of a loving God—a God in whom her faith was perfect with a wonderful simplicity. A dreadful sensation of aloneness gripped her; she was forsaken, isolated. From that instant and for an hour she moved subconsciously, directed by what, in the lesser animals, we call instinct, and this instinct, besides moving her feet in flight, informed her, with a certainty not to be shaken, from whom it was she fled. That she knew also. She knew who had killed Paul, who had sought to kill her, and why. Years of aversion and of suspicion offered their explanation. Her uncle, Xavier Caron, was the man, and the fortune which was hers and her brother's, in equal shares, was his object. This knowledge arrived at without effort gave motion to her paralyzed limbs. . . .

How she left the theater undisturbed was a matter lost in confusion. Her next clear recollection was of wandering the streets of deserted Lower Town, and there, of accosting a young man, obviously a gentleman. . . . And he—there was something strange about him, something savoring of drink or madness—had advised her to seek help of the river.

To the river she went, not in pursuance of his advice or to do

the unspeakable thing he suggested, but because the river was one avenue of departure. Along the black wharves she wandered until she heard voices, and then she concealed herself. The voices came from a tiny schooner whose deck was piled high with merchandise and she listened. . . . Gradually came silence and then a powerful snoring, but Nérée had found the way. The voice had informed her the little vessel would cast off at dawn to sail down the river. It was down the river she must go.

Presently she emerged from her hiding place in the shadow and crawled aboard. In the waist of the ship she again concealed herself by crawling under a tarpaulin spread protectively over bags of cargo, and there she crouched and prayed —for she had remembered God.

As she lay there, half stifled by the odor of ancient canvas, she remembered Him distinctly, remembered the faith in His omnipotence, the confidence in the rightness of His decisions, which had always been hers. . . . She was no longer alone. A childlike simplicity characterized her devotion, and she felt sure that, if the matter but came properly to his attention, the compassionate Jesus would have her in his keeping. . . . And the saints! Now that she was on the water, the good Ste. Anne would be particularly concerned for her. . . . It was comforting.

All this Nérée Caron remembered as she walked sturdily toward Ste. Agnès and her destination, and she remembered her fear when she was discovered by Seraphin Simard, captain and owner of the craft—a fear not so great as Seraphin's astonishment. She recalled how he had dragged her out not too gently, and then how he had stood with bulging eyes and gaping mouth, calling upon the saints to witness what he had found aboard his schooner, and summoning his wife to participate in the marvel. They had been kind to her, these two,

after listening to her partially told tale and being witnesses to her fear and bewilderment and helplessness. . . . She had given a name not her own, but they were not suspicious folk, and very little in the way of circumstantial detail satisfied them. It was enough that she fled from a cruel uncle. Seraphin's good wife scented a romance . . . and the result of it all was that Nérée remained a passenger until, days later and after more than one docking to decrease or increase the cargo, the little vessel arrived at St. Irénée.

From one landing upon the southerly shore of the river Captain Seraphin brought aboard for Nérée's pleasure a newspaper. From it she learned that she rested under accusation of having murdered her brother, and that it was thought, in the terror of the black accomplishment, she might have taken her own life by drowning. The facts were there, all the terrible, damning facts, and when she read them Nérée knew the height and the depth and the width of the wickedness of her uncle Xavier. It was a matter carefully planned with efficient eye to details, even to the telegram, sent in her name, but which she did not send, urging her brother Paul to come to Quebec—the purchase of candy which she had not purchased—the interest she had shown for some time past in poisons, and especially in that deadly drug whose smell is the smell of bitter almonds. It was all there, that and more, contributed little by little by several, but the most damaging matters wrung from the distracted Xavier. The paper spoke of him sympathetically; told of his reluctance to speak, and described his appearance, his courtesy, the splendor of his character even as Xavier would have described them had he been writing the description himself.

And now Nérée must think again, recall every seemingly trivial detail once more in her effort to find the truth. . . . Her brother had been in her dressing room when she came?

Why? . . . Almost immediately his eye had fallen upon the box of candy—and what was it he said? She strove to recall his exact words—did recall them. "*There it is,*" he had said. This was not the way a boy would speak who saw an unexpected box of candy. It was the utterance of some one who found a thing he expected to find or had been searching for. . . . Nérée pondered this and revised her conclusions. . . . Now, she told herself, she had arrived at the truth: The candy had not been placed in her dressing room to poison her. No. It had been placed there and young Paul sent to eat of it in order that she might be accused of killing him. . . . As she studied the Uncle Xavier who had been her guardian for ten years, she saw that this was like him. . . . If Uncle Xavier committed a crime he might be depended upon to furnish an innocent person to suffer for it. . . .

What had been merely a catastrophe became in addition a fearsome problem. The matter had been simple to her inexperience and terror: to disappear, to save herself by vanishing. Now it was complex, terrible. She was not merely a runaway now, she was a fugitive, and the knowledge brought a numb despair. For hours there was the thought of declaring herself, of returning to face and to deny the accusation. Instinct forbade, and then reason. . . . No, until she could think it out, until she could take advice, until she could act with reasonable hope in a fortunate outcome, she would continue as she had begun and finish her journey to Ste. Agnès.

And so the day which saw the coming of Donovan Steel to La Malbaie, a few miles to the southeastward, saw also the coming of Nérée Caron to the parish of Ste. Agnès, the parish of spinning women. Both had been betrayed, both had been cast out of the world which was theirs by the treachery of those they were entitled to trust. But here ended the similarity.

Donovan Steele was made bitter, coldly, dangerously bitter. He taunted God and despised his fellow-men. . . . Nérée Caron was not bitter, and her betrayal by a man made her turn with increased confidence toward the mercy and the unfailing goodness and wisdom of Heaven.

Chapter *Six*

If one can be said to enter a thing so nearly non-existent, Nérée Caron entered the settlement of Ste. Agnès at an hour when the sun was enlarging itself grandiosly in preparation for its descent behind the mountains. The sun, in common with a great many lesser folks, likes to make a stir about its departure, as if to impress those who remain with what they are about to lose. . . . Nérée was not certain she was in Ste. Agnès, and this was pardonable, because there were not more than half a dozen buildings, and they much scattered along the dipping road. There was nothing which looked like a store, though there had to be a store if this were her destination. There was a *forgeron,* it is true, but one blacksmith's shop cannot be said to comprise the entire downtown section of a town.

At her left was a long, scrambling building, unpainted, which seemed to claw at the ground with a sort of grim determination to hold its place. It was sway-backed and seemed to have grown a couple of wings in thoughtless moments. If one of those wings had seceded and moved a little away from the main structure nobody would have been in the least surprised. The high porch which ran along the entire front betrayed something more than mere thoughtlessness; it was positively absent-minded. It sprouted out of the ground instead of growing from the house, as a well-conducted porch should, and by reason of its skinny legs and the cavern underneath, it gave the whole house an effect of being undernourished. A number of chickens and a dog or two occupied this cavern. Perhaps this was why the porch had been built. The steps were at the far end, as remote from the door as

was possible, and from the road to the front of the house there was not even an inch where a blade of grass had ever grown. It was almost the barest ground Nérée had ever seen.

She mounted this porch to make inquiries, and quite unexpectedly found she was at the entrance to the village store. There was no window for display. The room could quite as well have been a large dining room or a bedroom or an attic as a store. Nobody seemed to care whether it was a store or not, for there were neither purchasers nor venders, and what there was to sell stood about in a naïve confusion—bags and gunny sacks full of some commercial mustery and a couple of sparsely filled shelves of hardy groceries. . . . But it was more than a store to Nérée Caron—it was a haven.

"Delima," she called, her voice rising with vibrant eagerness. "Delima."

"Who calls?" asked a voice from the regions above her head.

"Descend! Descend! . . . Oh, art thou never coming? Quick! Be quick! It is I."

There was a rush, the pad of softly clad feet bearing a not fragile body down the stairs, and a woman who was well on her way toward becoming a replica of an apple dumpling burst into the store. She paused on the threshold, stared with hands far apart and black eyes snapping. . . . Nérée removed her hat. Thereupon the apple dumpling descended upon her with cries and swept her to a bosom in which she was presently engulfed.

"*P'tite!* . . . *Mignonne!* . . . My little one, my baby!" so went the excited, astounded, delighted murmurings. "You have come! At last you have made to arrive. . . . Odilon! Odilon! Where do you hide yourself, lazy one? *She* is here. . . ."

Nérée covered the mouth of her old nurse with her hand. "Hush!" she said. "None must know."

"But Odilon—and Madame—"

"They shall know, truly, but in a soft voice, Delima—oh, so soft! The good neighbors, Delima—we must make a story for them."

"By example! . . . But thou, little one—these clothes. Where is thy carriage or thy car? I heard not wheels."

"I walked," said Nérée, "from St. Irénée."

"Walked—thou!" She named a number of saints in her amazement, but then her round, joyful face altered, became stern. The black eyes narrowed. "It has come," she said. "What I have many times spoken of to Odilon—it has come. *What has that man done to you?*"

"Uncle Xavier Caron! . . . How did you know? How—"

Delima sniffed. "Think you I left you of my own will? Think you I would have left you alone—for nothing but to marry this Odilon Turcot, for all his store and money in the bank—if I had not been sent away? Foolish one. It was he, with his white hair and his manners of the grand gentleman. . . . Have I not feared him? Did I not regard his kindness to you—how always he was of a most disgusting courtesy—and how, thereafter, his eyes remained on you as if he thought and thought and thought! You shall tell me what it is that he has done, and then, in the morning, I shall put on my best dress of black silk and the lazy Odilon shall drive me to the train. . . . When I make to arrive in Montreal, then shall we see. Aha! We shall regard the smooth, pink cheeks of him and how they shall look when my nails have done."

"Delima! . . . Delima! . . ." And now, for the first time since that dreadful evening, tears came to Nérée, a very flood of tears, until the spot upon which her head rested softly was wet with them, and she rejoiced in them, rejoiced in the

comfort and the love and the fidelity which she could feel in every beat of the heart beneath that spacious bosom. . . . And then she told the tale of disaster, to which Delima listened with interjections and exclamations and incredulous cries.

"Ah, that devil of a man!" she said at the end. Then: "But this you may depend upon, my little one, it will be no easy trap to extricate yourself from. No. No. He has been making it ready through the years, and he is of a patience! Ah, never have I seen him in anger, never, by one little bit, does he allow himself to be disturbed. I have seen. Always *so*. For nothing does he ever change. Patient and cunning and very wicked is that man, but we shall see. My Odilon, he may be lazy, but all the same he has the good head. He makes to think more clearly, almost, than our priest in his own parlor. It is so. Many come to ask the word of Odilon Turcot on important affairs. . . . And as for Madame, his mother—regard you, little one, she is of a wisdom unbelievable. And so we shall see what we shall see."

"But," said Nérée, "none must know I am I. The news would travel. . . . No, I must have a new name."

"Of a certainty. Me, I am not much good for that, but when my Odilon puts his head to it, you shall see how easy the thing is. For work, as I say, he is not so well, but for thinking the parish cannot equal him, no nor La Malbaie, either, for that matter?"

"Where is this husband that I have never seen?" asked Nérée.

Delima spread her thick fingers. "Who shall say? Doubtless wearing out the homespun of his trousers on somebody's doorstep while he waggles his tongue. . . . But he will come. Have no fear. He is not lost."

"And Madame?"

"But listen," said Delima. Through the ceiling came a

ceaseless purring whir, with now and then a little thump or the movement of a foot. "She spins," said Delima.

Then came Odilon, a jaunty wisp of a man with leather cheeks and extraordinary trousers. Nérée could not take her eyes from those garments to examine the face of the man who had won the heart of her old nurse. They were of homespun woven in the room above and of a stiffness unimaginable, so that they wrinkled and crinkled in strange, unexpected places. Delima, who had fashioned them, had done so by estimate rather than by measure, and she had been generous to her man, but it was in color and in pattern they achieved their sublimity. The groundwork was a rich tan—where groundwork was visible for square scrolls—if such a thing be possible —of burnt orange. You have seen these wireless aërials consisting of a square of wires which go around and around crossed braces until they end in a center like a spider's web. Well, such was the check of Odilon's trousers. Burnt orange upon tan, the scrolls containing an area of about a square inch. Undoubtedly the pattern was agreeable, or would have been in another place, but to see it advancing upon one as a covering for a man's legs demanded great resolution not to utter some exclamation of admiration. Nérée managed to contain herself while the sparrow-like little man took her hand and looked into her face with the brightest eyes she had ever seen, with eyes that danced and that crinkled at the corners and fairly exuded curiosity in all things and a vast interest in life.

"It is my little one, of whom I tell you so often," said Delima. "See, is she not more beautiful than I said? . . . She is in great trouble and comes to us."

"But who should she come to?" demanded Odilon. "Eh? I ask you that." His manner dared anybody to answer. "If she should not come to Odilon Turcot and his wife, then—Aha! But if there is trouble there also must be discretion.

First we shall see." He closed the door firmly, peered out of the window, assured himself nobody lurked in the next room, and returned expectantly to his wife.

"Now," he said, importantly, "you shall tell it all to me, Odilon Turcot, and we shall see." He cocked his head and looked at Nérée out of the corners of his eyes with an expression of tremendous sagacity. "Aha! We shall see."

When the story was told again he stood pensively reflecting, while Delima eyed him proudly. She raised her brows to Nérée as much as to say: "See him now. It is thus he is at his best and it is a most remarkable best. Regard him. He is thinking now!"

Presently he completed what preliminary study of the problem as was necessary, and teetered back on his heels with the air of one who holds the solution in his hand.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "shall be the daughter of the cousin of my brother-in-law. Is it not so? And she comes to us because she has been lonely on that little farm where there are no neighbors and no church and no *curé*—and where never a young man comes in to sit the candle out in the evening. . . . Ah! So that is settled, and so the story shall be related to the neighbors."

"But—Odilon and Delima—I must tell you. I have nothing—no money, no clothes. . . ."

"Naughty one!" Delima exclaimed.

"Ah, my wife she is right! Mademoiselle does wrong to mention such matters to us. Is she not the little one of my wife, and is not all we possess—which is little enough, indeed—already mademoiselle's?"

"At once my needle shall be busy," said Delima. "Tomorrow Odilon shall make the journey to La Malbaie and in the great store of Monsieur Courier he shall buy enough for many dresses."

"And also," said Odilon, assuming an air of great foresight and cunning, "I shall find a newspaper. . . . Often we have a newspaper in this house, mademoiselle. Indeed yes. It is now not two months since a paper came through that very door! . . . And in it we shall read of mademoiselle's affairs and from it come to conclusions how we must conduct ourselves."

Delima's eyes rested fondly upon Nérée, noted how her shoulders drooped, the shadows that came in her cheeks, and the weariness of her face.

"Dolt! Lazy one!" she exclaimed. "We stand here while my baby dies of weariness—and of hunger. Set out a chair in the room yonder and soften it with pillows while I find milk rich with cream. . . . And summon Madame from the spinning."

Presently, in the long shadowed room, carpeted with hook rugs which would have lighted covetousness in the eyes of any collector, Nérée found herself at ease in a great chair propped up by pillows like the veriest invalid before the dining table.

Though it was still daylight, Odilon would have made a display by lighting the gaudy oil lamp reserved for occasions, but, being a man of ideas with thought for detail, he refrained from this pleasure. It might cause neighborly comment and give rise to surmises. So, having seen to Nérée's comfort, he bustled up the stairs, where, for five minutes, his voice might have been heard buzzing as the hum of the spinning-wheel ceased, and then he reappeared, leading a little old lady even more sparrow-like than himself, who wore a flapping black straw hat tied under her chin, and with much ceremony presented her as his mother.

Madame Turcot was a personage. It was not enough that she was mother to Odilon Turcot, the leading man of the parish. She was an individual in her own right. Nérée

thought she had never seen such youthful eyes in so aged a face, such sharp, kindly, wise eyes. Madame was a pert old lady whose face was a cameo and whose manner would have graced a drawing-room.

"Mademoiselle is welcome," said Madame.

"You are kind—all so kind."

"It is we who should speak of kindness—that mademoiselle should think of us in her need. . . . My son, stand not staring like an owl, but get about thy concerns. Presently Delima and I will put this little one to bed, for she is worn out and needs repose and quiet. Out with you."

A sensation of peace, of safety, had stolen over Nérée in that house, stolen over her little by little so gradually and tactfully that she had been unaware of its approach. She sighed and smiled, and such was her weariness, that when she had eaten the bowl of bread and milk she was scarcely aware how Delima and Madame led her aloft to the best and airiest and roomiest bedroom, there to undress her and to assist her into the softest feather bed that ever invited tired aching body.

It was noon next day before she awakened to find Delima and Madame expecting the return of Odilon from La Malbaie.

"Nay," said Delima, sharply, "the lazy one—the talker. He should be here long ago—but who knows? If he can find any to listen while his tongue wags—*mon Dieu!* who knows when it will be? But he will return with a tale of great circumstance and so avoid a scolding. You shall see."

It was two o'clock before a cloud of dust far down the road apprised Delima that her tardy husband was returning. She took station on the porch, her face stern and ready words in her mouth, when Odilon drove up with such flourish as he could muster with staid and plodding horseflesh. Delima opened her mouth, but Odilon's eye had been on her, and before she

could speak he exclaimed: "Ah, little one! And mademoiselle and my mother—ah—I have seen a marvel. I have seen a thing which will not await the telling."

Delima shot a glance at Nérée, which said, plainly, "Did I not tell you?" It was, nevertheless, a proud glance.

"It happened in La Malbaie," said Odilon as he scrambled over the wheel, "and I saw it with my own eyes. Incredible! Magnificent, but evil! By example. That was a young man to fear."

"Arrive at the story," said his mother, dryly.

"I am on the porch of the hotel," said Odilon, "listening to the talk of two voyagers of commerce—men who sell cloth and shoes—when there appears upon the bridge before me that great Hyacinthe Lessard, and from the voice in which he sings it is apparent to all that he has been tipping the bottle. *Mon Dieu!* but he is huge, this brute, and, as all know, savage and terrible. There comes walking from the other direction Achille Gagné, who, too late, perceives whom he must encounter on the bridge. Achille is not large nor is he one who makes trouble, but before he can turn, this Hyacinthe stumbles a little and makes to collide with Achille, which greatly enrages the big man. Ah! . . . Thereupon he seizes Achille and jerks him about so his heels leave the boards of the bridge and he dangles in the air, and with his fist Hyacinthe beats him about the head, while Achille calls loudly for one to save him." Odilon paused with excellent art. "This," he explained, "is not the marvel. It is but a common matter. . . . However, unnoticed by us, there comes from behind another, not known to us, who would cross the bridge, but Hyacinthe so tosses about the little Achille that the way is blocked. Still the stranger comes on, paying no heed, and then we become aware of him and would have warned him, but it was too late. . . . He was a young man, this newcomer, large, but not of the immense-

ness of Hyacinthe, and most singular in his manner. Indeed, he seemed not at all to see the fighting men and walked forward as if his way was impeded by nothing. . . . Then this Achille beholds him from the corner of his eye and cries the more loudly for succor. The young man does not heed, but marches on as if he has no eyes to see, and Hyacinthe swings Achille's heels so that they miss the young man's stomach by but a hair. . . . Then, regard me!—this so peaceful, so blind young man—as if he picked a flower from its stem, reaches out his hand and plucks Achille from Hyacinthe—*so!* And tosses him to one side." Again Odilon paused to see that all attention was his.

"It was," he said, "as if the young man but cleared his way of some obstacle, see you. . . . But Hyacinthe is more than an obstacle, I may tell you. Indeed yes. He is not pleased at being disturbed in his frolic, and from his throat there issues a horrible bellowing of rage. . . . But this young man does not pause, nor does he seem to look. Ah, said I to myself, he walks in his sleep. Of a truth, that was the manner of him! And then this monster Hyacinthe springs upon him, and we all, who are watching, expect to behold him trampled, but not so. A thing comes to pass—a blow, another blow, very sudden, like the striking of a snake—and the vast Hyacinthe lies upon his back, kicking hither and thither. . . . And now comes the marvel, for this young man does not regard his fallen foe nor wait for him to arise. For him Hyacinthe might have been a loose board in the bridge, for he walks upon him. Of a truth! As if nothing has happened and as if no man lies there, this young man proceeds on his way, and once he steps upon the stomach of Hyacinthe, and once upon his chest, and once upon his face, and Hyacinthe screams—and so, calmly, the young man passes and comes toward us. . . . I shiver

as if a cold wind blows, for the thing was not human. . . . It was of a ruthlessness unbelievable."

"What then?" demanded Delima.

"Then this Achille who has been saved runs after the stranger and grasps his hand and says many words of thanks; but the young man pushes him away roughly and says a thing."

"What thing does he say?"

"Who are you?" he demands, cold as the winter. "Why should I save you? He may break your neck, for all it makes to me. I help no man. . . . I but cleared my way to walk." And, so saying, he came upon the porch where we sat, speaking to none, and passed into the hotel, and a big man who sat there—the man Cluny who is boss at St. Fidèle—he expels his breath and exclaims in English so that I do not understand. . . . And there, was that not a thing worth beholding?"

Such, apparently, was Donovan Steele's introduction to the Murray River country. . . .

Nérée Caron frowned at the end of the recital and shook her little head. "This young man," she said, "must have a wicked heart. I should fear him."

"Yet," said Odilon, "he was handsome."

"But his saying, 'I help no man'—think of that! He must be wicked and cruel indeed."

"If," said Odilon, "you could but have seen. I still shiver at the recollection."

Chapter Seven

CLUNY pushed back his chair and followed Donovan Steele into the hotel. The young man mounted the narrow stairs to his room under the roof, a room separated from its neighbors by partitions of matched lumber. Cluny rapped on his door, and then, without waiting for an invitation, entered.

"I've a job for you," he said.

Donovan turned his head over his shoulder and eyed Cluny austerely, but made no rejoinder.

"Harris, up at La Chute, wants a man. We talked about it last night."

Donovan's lip curled. "You don't want me at St. Fidèle," he said.

"What do you know about the woods?" countered Cluny.

"Nothing."

"I'll let somebody else pay for your experience," Cluny said, coolly. "When you have it we'll see about St. Fidèle."

Donovan waited.

"Take the job," said Cluny. "Learn the pulp business—from woods to freight cars. I'm in town Saturdays and Sundays and we'll talk. I'll know when you're ready for a real job."

"So will I," said Donovan.

"Keep your eyes open. Learn the whys and the whatevers. You're going to school, and I'll be the teacher to examine you."

Donovan was direct. "You want me to take that job so I can report to you what is going on," he said. "What's the idea?"

Cluny permitted himself a grin. "That," he said, "is for me to know and you to find out."

"Which," said Donovan, "I shall do."

"Well?"

"Who owns the mill?"

"An estate in Montreal—owns the mills and a signoury twenty-five square miles of timber."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders. It was nothing to him, and to earn a livelihood was immediately necessary. "Bring on your job," he said.

"Harris, the manager, will be down this noon. We'll fix it then. . . . There's money to be made in this country—by the right man."

"What's your idea of the right man?"

"One that keeps his eyes open and his mouth shut—"

"And, I gather, who isn't troubled by little matters such as biting the hand that feeds him." He shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter to me what hand I bite."

"So long," said Cluny, "as you don't bend your teeth."

Donovan walked over to the bed and sat down. So far as he was concerned the interview was over. Cluny stood a moment, his big eyes twinkling, before he turned to the door. "We'll fix it this noon," he said.

Donovan gave the matter little thought. It was nothing to him what went on under the surface or whose fingers were to get pinched. As a matter of fact he had no curiosity. A job for himself was his one concern, and he would conduct himself in it as he pleased, regardless of Cluny or anybody else. He was working for Donovan Steele, and anybody who thought he was his man labored under error. A job at La Chute, so long as at satisfied him, was as good as a job at St. Fidèle. . . . And so, at noon, he descended to meet Harris at the long table in the dining room—the long table about which

gathered a dozen men, hungry, who took their soup without conversation, but, nevertheless, not in silence. It was not until the waitress had exploded a phrase announcing the bill of fare as "jambonœufsbiftik," that Cluny touched upon the matter of employment.

"This here young man," he said to Harris, "is lookin' for a job. I been talkin' to him and I'd use him myself—but you need him worse 'n I do."

Harris, an undersized man with a ragged mustache and a worried expression, admitted his need of men. "You speak French?"

"He speaks reg'lar France French," said Cluny.

Harris considered. "I need thirty-forty men in the woods right now. Beats all where my men go to. Seems like I can't hang on to 'em. . . . Uh-huh. . . . Tell you what, how'd you like to go out and dig up some for me? Scout around the country. After that we'll settle on a reg'lar job."

"When?" said Donovan.

"Fetch your things out to La Chute this noon. Come down on the hand-car. Get a horse and start out to-morrow." He turned to the door and shouted, "Hey, Gonzague! Is Gonzague out there?"

"But yes, monsieur, I am here."

"I want a horse and cart for two-three days."

"Also a *charetier?*"

"Yes. Have him at La Chute—*sept heures et demi.*"

"Oui, m'sieu."

So the matter was settled: Donovan Steele found employment, which was all that was of importance to him; Cluny placed a man who might or might not turn out to be valuable in a place where he wanted a man, and the harassed Mr. Harris hoped for the best. It was a pebble thrown into water, and, as the worn metaphor tells us, ripples spread out from such a

splash to swell on and on in an ever-widening circle until they reach some shore. . . . But what your makers of metaphors fail to point out is that such ripples form a ring about the spot where the stone met the water, shutting it in, surrounding it. Your stone is imprisoned in ripples of its own making. A little event is imprisoned in an ever-widening circle of unlooked-for events, so that there is never any escaping. To perform an act, even of minor decisiveness, is to imprison yourself, to enslave yourself to that act. It throws a magic ring about you, and from it you cannot win freedom no matter how you struggle. . . . It is also a fact that, eventually, everything in the pond is circumscribed by the ripple ring.

If Donovan could have seen who occupied the pond with him he would have been astonished, or perhaps he would not have cared. At this time not caring was the object he aimed for and seemed to attain. However, had he been aware that his inconspicuous ripple embraced a man of whom he had never heard, a man who, that afternoon, debarked from the old *Cape Diamond* when it docked at Point au Pic, he might have given some thought to the matter, saturnine or otherwise.

The gentleman who landed with his baggage to take up his residence for a time in the famous Manoir Richlieu—that aristocrat among Canada's resort hotels—was a man whom you would have marked even upon the boulevards. Tall and slender he was, with beautiful waving white hair—hair which had silvered twenty years before its time—with fine, handsome, Gallic features such as one associated with dukes and marquises and members of the old aristocracy. And he had a manner! Even the hotel clerk was impressed and brought forth such stores of courtesy as he possessed. It was also a noticeable fact that this gentleman wore about the arm of his exquisitely fitting coat a band of black. . . . When the clerk turned the register to read the name of the new guest he was,

for the moment, at a loss for polite conversation, for the name brought him into contact with the nine days' wonder which agitated all of Quebec and seethed and rumbled as far away as Montreal. For the gentleman's name was Xavier Caron.

As it was, Donovan got up from the table, packed his few belongings, and rode to La Chute with Mr. Harris, and in the morning, quite unconcernedly, set out on his quest for woodsmen to go into the forest and slaughter fine spruce trees in order that New York's East Side might ultimately be served with the details of the latest unsavory divorce in high circles, or be misdirected as to the trend of the country's business or statesmanship.

It was Gonzague who drove him tunefully, breaking off a stanza now and then to address recrimination to his horse, which did not disturb Donovan, because he was busy with his own reflections.

"Derrièr' chez vous ya-t-yn étang,
En roulant ma boule,
Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant,
Rouli, roulant ma boule roulant.
En roulant ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule."

He glanced sidewise at Donovan to note the effect, and, none being perceptible, fell silent for as long as silence was possible to him.

"We go to hire men for the woods?" he offered, presently.

"Yes."

"They are few."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders.

"The *fermiers* they make to work in their fields," said Gonzague. "They plow and plant. . . . But we may find some—a few."

There was no response, and Gonzague blinked, saying to himself: "Ah, this is no companion. Is he afflicted with deafness in the ears?"

After a pause he tried once more. "Odilon Turcot he is the big man of his village—the storekeeper—and people do as he says. He will know if there are men."

"Drive there, then," said Donovan, and, discouraged, Gonzague relapsed into monologue and song, this time choosing to solace himself with a lullaby:

"Sainte Marguerite,
Veillez ma petite!
Endormez ma petite enfant
Jusqu'a l'âge de quinze ans!
Quand elle aura quinze ans passe,
Il faudra la marir,
Avec un p'tit bonhomme
Qui viendra de Rome."

They arrived at last at the store of Odilon Turcot in the hamlet of Ste. Agnès, and, leaving Gonzague to care for his horse, Donovan alighted and mounted the steps. As was customary, the store was deserted, and after waiting a moment, he walked along the piazza to a second door upon which he rapped, and which presently was opened by a young woman.

"Monsieur Turcot, is he at home?" Donovan asked.

"But no—he will return in ten minutes—in half an hour—in an hour. Is it that m'sieu will enter and wait?"

Donovan hesitated briefly. He might as well wait, for no purpose could be served by hurrying on. "I thank you," he said, and entered. "You are perhaps the daughter of M'sieu Turcot?"

"No—a relative," said Nérée. She regarded Donovan

keenly and a little fearfully, for, so it seemed to her, his face was not without familiarity—and she had reason to be apprehensive of familiar faces. But he seemed not to see her at all, to take no interest in her, and apprehension vanished.

"Will m'sieu seat himself—and perhaps drink a glass of milk?" she asked.

Donovan glanced at her face, for her diction was not precisely what one would have expected in that room, and he, too, experienced a sense of familiarity—a vague discomfort as if the face he saw were connected with unpleasant events. He turned his eyes away and accepted the proffered chair. The sound of spinning-wheel and loom came to his ears from above. . . . He was not at his ease. A desire possessed him to look again at the girl's face, but he repressed it. What were women's faces to him? What if this face were lovely and vaguely, uncomfortably familiar?

"You have driven far?" asked Nérée.

"Only from La Chute."

Where had she seen that face? It came to her as from a dream, but she struggled in vain to reconstruct the dream. There was an unpleasant thing connected with the reminder of this man's eyes, but she could not touch it. Again she was afraid, vaguely alarmed—on her guard. Her face was mobile, given to displaying her emotions, and Donovan, glancing at her again in spite of his resolution, became aware of her apprehension. But he laid it to the door of country bashfulness.

"If m'sieu will excuse me," she said, tremulously, and, not waiting for his reply, she left the room abruptly. Donovan, left alone, could not withdraw his thoughts from her face. It suggested something, something both lovely and unpleasant. . . . Perhaps it was only that any woman with a beautiful face had become unpleasant to him, suspect—more than sus-

pect, convicted. He despised all men, but as for women—they filled him with a sort of loathing. Their business in life was to betray men and to break their hearts—to seduce men's love by their beauty and the cunning of their sex, and then to destroy. . . . He would not think of women, would not let his mind dwell upon this woman.

He glanced about the room. On the table before him lay a newspaper—a Quebec journal printed in French—and to distract his mind picked it up and glanced at it. It was days old. He spread it before him—and then, from the headlines a name seemed to stand forth in high relief. . . . Caron—Nérée Caron! Ah, he remembered her—that society girl who danced, that flame among blades of grass! And then he read. . . . As he read he sneered, sneered at himself, for he remembered the words he had spoken to Mrs. Brokaw in the theater about this Nérée Caron. "She has a look," he had said, "as if you could check your life with her and find it safe and cared for when you returned."

What a fool he had been! Driveling sentiment—but that sentiment had been crushed out of him. . . . A woman to check your life with—so he had read her face—yet, within a matter of minutes after his reading of her she had poisoned a child—her own brother! Well, nothing a woman did—nothing vile and treacherous man or woman could do—could surprise or hurt him now. He was armored. . . . But what else was his mind fumbling for—something dark, indistinct, some part of a nightmare?

There was a sound at his elbow. The girl had re-entered with a glass of milk in her hand. He drew away as if moved by instinct away from the touch of a woman, and again looked into her face, and then he smiled, not a pleasant smile to see.

"Nérée Caron," he said.

"And you," she said before terror had moved to clutch her heart, "are that young man who refused me help. . . . Who told me to go to the river."

Then her face lost its color and she clutched the table for support. Donovan's lips twitched. "You're afraid—because I recognize you," he said. "It's no concern of mine."

"But—but—"

"I saw you dance that night," he said. "A man I was with said you were a flame among blades of grass. I remember, we all thought you were something more than beautiful, and I, myself, said a foolish thing. . . . I remembered it while I was reading the paper here."

She remained frozen in silence.

"I said," he told her, not sneeringly, but with a voice cold as ice, "that you looked the sort of woman one could check his life with and find it safe and cared for when he returned. . . . Droll, isn't it—when one considers?"

"Oh!" she said.

"Everyone I have ever trusted, or liked, or been drawn to trust, has turned out that way," he said.

"What—what shall you do?"

"About recognizing you here, you mean? . . . Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Why should I?"

"You believe I—killed Paul?"

"Why not?"

"I didn't. . . . I didn't. . . ."

"It's of no consequence to me."

"But I didn't. Oh, please believe me! . . . I— This is the first time I've seen anyone who—who knew me and who believed I could—"

"What I believe or disbelieve doesn't matter," he said, rather wearily. "Whether you really did this thing or not doesn't

signify. . . . If you hadn't done this you'd have done something as bad. The only thing of importance to you is that you have no cause to worry because I have seen you. . . . Not that I care what becomes of you or whether they find you or not. . . ."

"You—you couldn't have known Paul was dead when—when you refused to help me."

"I'd never heard of Paul."

"Then why—"

"Because," he said, "it was no concern of mine. Why should I help you or anybody? Men and women don't help each other—except in romances. They desert each other, and betray each other and kill each other. . . . It's natural, I suppose."

"Do you believe that, m'sieu?" she asked, studying his face with grave eyes.

"I have had it proven upon me."

"And you do not know that God is good and that the blessed Jesus loves and cares for us all—and that—that wickedness happens only once in a while—like some disease? Don't you know these things? Don't you know that people love each other and would rather do good than evil? Don't you know the world is full of kindness and honor and honesty—and that it is only the unfortunate who are bad? . . . Because it is true."

"I know the opposite is true," he said.

"Then," she said, "I am more sorry for you than you could be for me—if you knew the truth and understood what sympathy is. I know—in spite of everything. . . . I have been—betrayed as you say. I have been driven from my home—and a man whose duty was to care for me and to protect me—

has made it seem to the world I have done this awful thing. . . . But, for all that, I know what I know."

He leaned back in his chair and scrutinized her. She was beautiful, and if ever a face was created to inspire trust and belief, and to demand of a man his purest, deepest love, it was this face, he thought. And yet it was but a mask, a deceit! Those eyes, those lips, those glowing cheeks, that sweet expressiveness, were the lure, the disguise worn by a woman—a mere girl—who could give poison to a twelve-year-old child!

"It's not worth arguing," he said.

"Some day you will know."

His lips twisted again.

"I shall pray to the saints for you," she said. "You must be very unhappy."

Before he could reply footsteps sounded on the porch and Odilon Turcot entered. He paused, bowed, and smiled.

"M'sieu seeks me?" he asked; and then his face changed, became less cordial, more wary. "What is it you desire?"

Donovan made clear his errand briefly, and Odilon answered in haste. One might have thought he was anxious to be done with Donovan and to show him from the house. Men were not to be had in that village, he said. All were employed or busied on their farms. No, it would be useless for m'sieu to enquire further, for he, Odilon Turcot, knew the facts.

Donovan moved toward the door, and Odilon, in defiance of that hospitality which he held a high duty, urged him toward his vehicle, nor did he breathe freely until the young man was in the seat and driving away. Then he entered the house, where he found Nérée standing in the door between kitchen and dining room, pale, trembling, big of eye. But he did not take note.

"Ah, he is gone. . . . I am not a man who knows fear easily, but of him I am afraid. . . . It is he, the man of the

bridge! Who trampled Hyaninthe. A most cruel man—a ruthless and dangerous man. I hope he comes not again."

Then Nérée spoke. "A most pitiful man," she said. "What unhappiness must be his!"

Whereupon the wise Odilon stared at her, for he could not in the least comprehend that saying.

Chapter Eight

Donovan Steele became a student; he studied pulp and men. He began by studying, not himself, but the material condition of his life, its lack of a competent special knowledge from which he might derive a better livelihood than was offered to the unskilled laborer, and saw that he must provide himself with a ladder to climb. Not that he was ambitious. He had no desire for wealth, no urge toward power, but rather a negative wish to get through the dark tunnel of life with as little fatigue and as few bruises as was possible. The woods offered the solitude he believed himself to crave, and there was in their lonely vastness, in the grim inertia with which they oppose the inroads of man, a voice which called with subtle invitation. The hand of every man is against the forest; the faint voices of its friends are drowned in the roar of falling trees, the ring of the ax, the raucous voice of the saw. Receding, ever receding, driven back and back before an onslaught which it can resist only by permitting its assailants to dash themselves against its defenses of distance and cold and snow, it stands ruthless and admirable. Men deal with our timber as your spendthrift deals with gilt-edged bonds left him by a careless father, squandering the principal rather than clipping the inexhaustible coupons. This Donovan Steele perceived in the first days of his study, and, or so it seemed to him, the forest and he were of a kind—of a kind, but dissimilar in this: the forest cannot strike back; it can only allow its enemies to kill themselves by their own carelessness in attack.

And so, through a peculiar sort of sympathy, a sense of affinity, perhaps, rather than a sympathy, Donovan deter-

mined to move his life in time to the receding fringes of the timber, to share its decline, to wring rewards from the men who battened it while helping them to batten. There was something confused in his thinking, something in his attitude which he himself did not comprehend—but for all that there ran through all his reflections a clear, direct thread which may have been instinct rather than reason. . . . Like a man who builds a house he went about erecting his new life. The site was selected for the edifice and he planned the building minutely. In his planning he did not neglect his neighbors—he excluded them deliberately, losing sight of the fact that a human being in any community, no matter how small or how remote, must reckon with the accidents and exigencies of other human beings whose orbits impinge upon his own.

His determination was to live his life along a straight line, without deviation, for himself alone. It was an intensely selfish determination. No other created being should be considered either with pity or with malice, with gratitude or with vengeance, with friendship or with enmity. He was to stand alone like a bare rock in the sea. . . . Even Simon Stylites atop of his column could not prevent ribald boys from standing at the foot of it, nor could he exist if water and food were not procured for him from lower and less acetic levels. . . .

Having chosen his path, he drove himself along its unlovely way with relentless scourge. As has been said, he studied the woods and men, perfecting himself by diligent labor and keen perception in all that had to do with the manufacture of pulp from felling the tree to loading the freight car with the finished product—but going farther and ever farther astray in the second, and more important, subject of his curriculum. The more Donovan Steele applied his mind to the subject of his fellow men the less he came to know about them. Those who have come into contact with the insane have seen how, choosing

a false premise, they can reason with extraordinarily brilliant logic to an absurd conclusion. Donovan accomplished this not altogether admirable feat: His premise was that all men and women were false, deliberately false. Accepting this as true, his logic was splendid and his planning was without a flaw. . . . He did not take the reasonable precaution of foreseeing that somewhere, sometime, he might encounter in an emergency one who was true, steadfast, faithful to the limits of human fidelity. Herein lay the danger of sudden wrecking.

Following his first week of recruiting for the woods he refused employment in the mill. This was following his plan of self-education. It was essential he should have a basis of knowledge of the labor of the woods, and so he went out to the camps. Scattered through the workings were two hundred men where there should have been three hundred. . . . Now your pulp operation is not in any sense a lumbering operation. Men talk in terms of cords instead of feet, and, as this work was organized, they worked in pairs rather than as the woodsmen work in crews. He found the men teamed together in pairs and that each pair did all that was essential to their work. Instead of one great operation he found a multitude of little operations—two-men projects—where the pair swamped their own roads, felled their own timber, cut it into four-foot bolts, skinned it and piled it. In theory each two men should produce a hundred cords of four-foot bolts in the season. . . . He became a member of such a team.

The other member was Leandre Savard, and Leandre, as association proved, was everything Donovan was not. In the first place, he was of a simplicity which only long and close association could grasp; in the second place, his confidence in the benevolence of *le bon Dieu* was boundless and unshakable as was his faith in the compassion of the sweet Jesus. As for the saints, he spoke about them quite in a matter-of-fact

way—as he might have spoken of persons who swayed a notable and beneficial influence with his employers. To Leandre, God was an entity whose business it was to conduct the world for the happiness of all, but whose justice was of a strictness which, but for the ameliorating power of his Son, might bestow upon a man his just deserts. The saints, too, having once been of human flesh, espoused the cause of weak mankind and strove ever to mitigate and to soften the just rigor of God. Also they sought opportunities to bestow favors upon the deserving. His attitude toward wickedness was interesting as he made it clear to Donovan during their first day's work. It seemed that people did evil for two reasons, and the chief of them seemed to be in order that Heaven might have an opportunity to display mercy.

"But regard," he said, "if all are good—if no man steals or commits a murder or does other wickedness, then how, I ask you, can the blessed saints intercede? Eh? That is a hard one to answer. *Par example!* They would have no occupation. Also think you of the great establishment of Purgatory. *Le bon Dieu* could not send a sinless man there, merely for the sake of having an occupant, is it not so? Therefore some must sin. And then there is the devil, who is very astute and full of tricks. *Eh bien!* I have thought much on it and have talked most often with my Odilie—that is, Odilie Boucher, with whom I shall marry in the spring—and she thinks with me that to be wicked is not so evil, after all, but only a misfortune, as one might say."

Donovan made no answer. In the day he had spoken scarcely a dozen words to his companion, and those in the way of necessity.

"But look you, if this devil plays a trick on me which makes me commit a sin, then who is at fault, the devil or Leandre Savard? Does any man sin because he wishes to die and

spend a long time in Purgatory? Now that is a foolishness. Do I chop my foot with an ax that I may see the blood run? No, it is bad fortune of the worst."

"Wait," said Donovan.

"For what should I wait?"

"Until you have been sinned against," said Donovan.

"Ah," said Leandre, thoughtfully. "I have seen that thing, and it makes hearts hard. I have seen father turn against son for such a sin, and husband against wife. But what does it prove, m'sieu? It proves only that we are less than God. *Vraiment!* All sins are a great wrong to God, yet he is so much above us that he can forgive and let the thing be forgotten. But we—we are but men, and it is too high a matter for us."

Donovan smiled. "But," he said, "what if your Odilie were to deceive you—and with a man who pretended to be your friend?"

"Ah, you do not know my Odilie! It could not be."

"But if it were."

"A thing what cannot be cannot be," said Leandre.

Nor was this simplicity and this faith all that was to be found in Leandre. He was happy. It was an abounding happiness which craved to impart itself to all it encountered, and when none of its contagion moved Donovan, Leandre was nonplused.

"Perhaps," he hinted, "you have a malady of the insides. You do not laugh, you do not sing. Even you do not talk. I have seen sick men so. . . . Now to-night, when we are in camp, I shall give you a medicine. My Odilie, at an expense and by writing a letter, got it for me. Little pills, no bigger than peas and of a dark color, but the little book accompanying them relate marvels. You need but to be ailing—it is a fever, perhaps, or a griping pain, or a swelling of the throat, or a

dizziness or aching of the head, or coughing and a soreness of the lungs. You have but to take one of these so little pills morning and night. It would appear they will cure any disease. And to-night you shall have two of them, and I shall relate to my Odilie how she cured my friend."

"Am I your friend?" Donovan asked, curiously.

"But we have worked together since the morning," said Leandre, with surprise.

Presently Donovan asked a question: "Do you know the big man at St. Fidèle whose name is Cluny?"

"Who does not know him?"

"Is he also good—as everybody else is?"

"He," said Leandre, "is to be feared."

"So—feared. And why?"

"First," said Leandre, "because no man—or any two men—may stand against him; and then because no one can tell what he desires. You may judge a man from his desires, m'sieu. Also you cannot read his mind. I have seen him laughing with a man, his face all jovial and kind, before he struck him down so that the man must be carried to the doctor."

"So no one can tell what he desires? Why do you think he desires anything, Leandre?"

"To me," said Leandre, "he has the air of one who is filled with desire."

This was a keenness of observation which Donovan did not expect to find in his companion. "And," he asked, "have you not guessed at what his desire may be?"

"I have thought—but doubtless it is not the true solution—that his desire is for wealth and women."

"Wealth and women! Either one of those things, Leandre, has made men commit great crimes."

"It is true." Leandre shook his head and was silent a

moment, but presently his chin lifted and he sang. . . . Even the shadow of Cluny could not lie upon him long.

One would be at a loss for a term to apply to the association between Donovan Steele and Leandre Savard. It was not friendship, because in friendship there must be something of affection given and taken by each party. It would seem that Donovan gave nothing and accepted nothing; that he tolerated Leandre because of the necessity of their employment. On his part that seemed to be all. With Leandre, as the days and weeks went by, it was different. It is true he did not understand Donovan, could not make out his silence and his austerity, was troubled in his simple heart because he seemed unable to awaken any response to his proffered friendship. That Donovan manifested no interest in him or in his confidences—those little stories of his life and of his love, of his Odilie and his courtship—was a source of bewilderment to him. How any man could fail to be thrilled by recitals of happenings of such gripping sort as how he had won Odilie against the rivalry of Jean Marier, who owned a farm and could play the violin like one in the heavenly chorus, was not to be comprehended by him. He felt the fault must lie in himself and in his telling.

Yet, in spite of all—perhaps because of all—a queer affection took root in him, growing, it may be, from an instinctive sympathy. Something in Donovan compelled his admiration. It is possible Leandre was one of those people who cannot be near another, no matter how undeserving, without lavishing from the inexhaustible wells of his affection. One never heard Leandre speak against another man, and, whatever tale might be told, he was able to discover something in mitigation. . . . He acknowledged Donovan as his superior tacitly, and Donovan accepted the position. Time found Donovan giving orders

and Leandre executing them without question and with doglike fidelity.

Once, of a Saturday night in camp—a night when Donovan had walked off into the dark woods to possess the solitude his fancy craved—Leandre had fought for him, fought and was soundly thrashed. It is easy to understand that Donovan was not beloved by the men among whom he lived, and this dislike manifested itself in frank and pointed criticism which Leandre resented.

"He is my friend," he said.

"A fine friend! May the saints keep such friends from me. . . . Who is he, this man? Doubtless he hides from the police of his own country."

"You lie, Onesime Debuc. He hides from no man," said Leandre, whereupon there was fighting, from which Donovan's defender emerged much the worse for his championship.

In the morning Donovan marked Leandre's discolored eye and bruised lip and such other signs of conflict as were patent, and inquired.

"It was a fight," said Leandre, somewhat diffidently, for he was not one to boast to a friend how he had fought in his behalf.

"With whom?" Donovan asked.

"Onesime Debuc."

"For what cause?"

Leandre sought to avoid, while Donovan pressed for an answer. "Did it concern Odilie?"

"But no."

"Then what was the cause?" From this persistent questioning a more subtle man than Leandre might have suspected how Donovan guessed the truth, but Leandre did not suspect.

"It was," he said, "because Onesime spoke a lie of you."

"And for that you fought?"

"You have asked," said Leandre, simply, "so I must answer or lie—and I do not lie."

"You are a fool," said Donovan, "to fight for any man."

"Who may call himself a man if he will not fight for the good name of his friend?"

"I am not your friend," said Donovan, coldly, "nor any man's friend."

"That," said Leandre, softly to himself, "is a great pity." And, though he was hurt by Donovan's words, he was not estranged. Perhaps the truth of the matter was that he did not believe them.

Donovan got up from his seat upon a rock. "Come," he said, and Leandre followed him to the steps of the cook shanty, where lounged a score of men. There Donovan paused, standing close to the group and, in cold silence, looking from eye to eye.

"Onesime Debuc," he said, "stand up." And Onesime stood up eagerly. Men who saw what followed recalled the brief encounter on the bridge at La Malbaie, and, adding the two events together, arrived at a result which went toward elevating Donovan into the personage he later became. . . . The fight was brief as it was merciless. It was not pleasant to see; it was not an enjoyable spectacle, as are most Sunday-morning fights. The spectators shivered and drew together, for there was a chill ruthlessness, an intention, in Donovan's fighting which choked enthusiasm and replaced it with fear. It was to be seen he took no pleasure in the exercise, as a man should, and that he fought in cold blood, as a man should not. When an end came and Onesime could no more arise to his feet, Donovan turned to the group again.

"I am not to be discussed," he said. "If any other thinks my name is to be bandied about, let him speak."

There followed dead, awkward silence. Donovan waited

briefly before he turned his back and walked away. Leandre followed, his heart rejoicing.

"You fought for me," he said, "because he had the best of me."

"You're a fool," said Donovan.

But for all this contemptuous denial, Leandre believed what he desired to believe. . . .

Chapter Nine

One of the symptoms of the malady which had fastened itself upon Donovan Steele's soul was a curiosity of a strange and morbid kind. As a crowd will gather to watch an unfortunate fallen in a fit, Donovan watched his fellows to scrutinize them in what might be termed seizures of moral epilepsy. According to his belief every man was waiting, consciously or unconsciously, to commit a villainy, and it was his pleasure to sit in his seat of isolation and to watch for that villainy to take place. To detect a man in a meanness or a petty wickedness gave him a curious gratification, for it proved him to be right in his reading of mankind; a sort of I-told-you-so satisfaction. Every instance of the kind was to him fresh demonstration of his wisdom in suspecting and in despising the men and women with whom nature has populated the world.

It was this curiosity which impelled him to tolerate the friendly advances of Leandre Savard. He watched Leandre with saturnine eye, and hoped for the day when this man who protested friendship should be guilty of a treachery. It was this curiosity which drove him to see again the man Cluny. Cluny, Donovan perceived, was bigger game than Leandre, a deep, still-running, crafty man, capable of a more skillful dissimulation and potent with a deadlier villainy. Cluny was not easy to read. He was a man, Donovan estimated, who would stalk no small game, and that with consummate cunning and finished woodcraft. He was moved to study Cluny, the bluff, hearty fellow. Cluny wanted to use him for some purpose, of that he was certain, so he determined to go to La Malbaie of a Saturday night to see Cluny, to walk softly

and warily in readiness to step aside from anything resembling trap or pitfall, and to take his pleasure in the comedy.

Cluny was at table in the hotel when Donovan arrived to take a vacant place. The big man looked up from his *habitant* soup long enough to glance at Donovan and nod. He did not speak, nor during the meal did he address the young man directly. He bandied humor with a couple of *voyageurs de commerce* and with the chemical expert from La Chute and with the young woman who asked if the guests would have jambonœufsbiftik, all in one breath. After dinner he sat on the porch and picked his teeth reflectively, now and then eying Donovan casually. Finally he arose and lounged over to where the young man sat on the upper step, and spoke in English.

"You ain't been to town often," he said.

"No," Donovan answered.

"I thought you was comin' in Sattidy nights."

"Why should you think so?"

"Because," said Cluny, sucking on his toothpick and giving the corner of his eye to Donovan, "I told you to, and most gen'ally folks do what I tell 'em."

"I'm here now," said Donovan.

"Why?"

"Not," said Donovan, "because you told me."

Cluny grinned good-naturedly. "I hear you got a job all right," he said.

"Yes."

"Like it?"

"I don't dislike it."

"You got a lot of education, hain't you?"

"Enough."

"It aint any of my business why you came up here into the woods," Cluny said, tentatively.

"That's true," said Donovan, coolly.

"But I got a right to my opinion," Cluny said.

"But," said Donovan, "not to express it."

"Um. . . . I heard about Onesime Debuc. But I ain't Onesime."

"No," said Donovan, "you're not Onesime—and therefore any opinions you may have you will keep to yourself."

"Right," said Cluny, and he seemed to be pleased with the answer. "Be you learning pulp?"

"Yes."

"Ready for a better job?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I don't care to be tied down—have no desire for responsibilities."

"Thinkin' of seein' a bit of the country, mebby?"

"Possibly."

"Um. . . ." Cluny lighted his pipe and smoked reflectively; he seemed to be considering the desirability of certain advances, or, perhaps, of a certain course of action. He made up his mind. "I'm drivin' over to Pointe au Pic," he said, "to see a man. Want to come?"

"Who is the man?" asked Donovan.

"His name," said Cluny, "is Caron—Xavier Caron. Mebby you heard tell of him?"

"No."

"One of the Caron family in that murder case. Uncle of the girl that was said to poison her brother. . . . If she's alive I calc'late she owns the signoury of timber you're cuttin' on, and the mill. But I don't see how she figgers to git much good out of it."

Donovan lifted his eyes and fixed them upon Cluny's. "And if she's dead," he asked, "who owns the property?"

"Why, I calc'late Xavier does," said Cluny.

"I'll go," said Donovan, promptly.

"Then git into the carriage," Cluny said, "and we'll start." Neither spoke during the pleasant evening drive to the great hotel. Cluny seemed to be occupied in stealing brief glances at his companion's face, and in digesting the information his eyes conveyed to him. Donovan was studying the situation—and thinking of Nérée Caron. He had not allowed himself to think of her before, for she was a woman and beautiful. Whenever she had intruded upon his thoughts he had banished her with brusqueness. Curious as he was about the workings of the minds and hearts of his fellows, he had allowed himself no curiosity regarding Nérée. The fact of the matter was that he was afraid to do so. Of men, no matter what their quality, he had no fear—of Nérée, with her gracious beauty, her clear eyes, her face of strength and of goodness—he was afraid. Her equipment to harm him was too perfect. Somehow, every time she came into his mind, there came with her that pronouncement of his judgment regarding her in the theater to Mrs. Brokaw, that she was a girl a man might check his life with in confidence. . . . It had been the last favorable judgment he had passed upon a living being, and before the words were dead upon the air this girl had poisoned a child and became a fugitive from justice. He sneered. No jury of men, he told himself, could study her face, watch day after day the purity and steadfastness of it, the false mirroring of an evil soul, and find her guilty of any act of wickedness. Therefore she was doubly, trebly dangerous. Immune as he was to all affection, and peculiarly immune to the emotion of love for a woman, he feared her. . . . And now he was going to see her uncle—and why? The truth was that he was going to see Nérée's uncle because he was Nérée's uncle. There was no escaping from that.

The *charetier* drove them up to the hotel, where they alighted and presently were rapping upon the door behind which Xavier Caron was to receive them. Donovan experienced a queer sensation of breathlessness—as if some event awaited him; as if, indeed, he had reached another corner in his life which he was about to turn. Cluny rapped and a voice bade them enter.

Xavier Caron arose to greet them and stepped forward as if they had been members of the old nobility whom he was honored to receive. He was not a young man, but he was younger than his hair. It was white, though abundant and beautiful. It was rather coarse, as waving hair so frequently is, but there is no disputing that it added another element of dignity to an already distinguished face. Xavier Caron was an extremely handsome man, though one did not think first of that, but rather that he was the ideal aristocrat. He was tall, slender, and, it was apparent at a glance, a man who denied himself little. His blue eyes moved from Cluny to Donovan and back again to the man with whom he was acquainted.

Between him and Cluny there were nothing but contrasts—even to the introduction of Donovan as Cluny made it.

"I fetched him along," Cluny said, indicating Donovan with his thumb. "Name of Steele."

"Mr. Steele, you are most welcome," said Caron. . . . "Ah—the young man of whom you spoke some time ago?" he said to Cluny.

Donovan glanced at Cluny in time to perceive a slight straightening of the brow. Caron should not have mentioned that Donovan's name had been discussed between them, he perceived, and smiled inwardly.

"Won't you be seated?" Caron asked, with that fine, perhaps exaggerated courtesy which was as much a part of him as

his hair. "I regret that I can receive you no better—but hotel accommodations—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Him and me is used to worse," Cluny said. "It hain't what you're received in but how you're received that counts."

"True. True. Better a crust with the heart of welcome than a grudged feast." He offered cigarettes. "And you, Mr. Steele, I understand you are new to the woods."

"As you know," said Donovan.

"But you love them, eh? Is it not that at last, perhaps, you have found your natural element?"

"I do not love them," said Donovan, "but they are here and I am here, so I make the best of them."

Caron glanced at him quickly with awakened interest. The quality of Donovan's voice, the purity of his French, marked him as one who had been a part of Caron's own world. Donovan noticed that in the man's sudden flicker of interest his eyes narrowed and his features set so that, for the instant, it was not the exquisitely cultured face of a dilettante in life, but the muscled, determined, able, predatory face of a man of strength, one able in affairs and no weakling. Caron smiled almost instantly.

"You are a philosopher," he said, "but I prefer the poets.

> "'Au plus profond des bois la patrie a son cœur,
> Un people san forêts est un people qui meurt.'"

he quoted.

"Any news of the girl?" Cluny asked, abruptly.

Donovan's eyes sought Caron's face at this question. He wanted to see how the mention of the girl affected the man who must profit by her crime. He saw only grief, dignified, reserved grief.

"There is no word," he said. "We fear—and we hope—that she may be dead. She were far better dead."

"I agree with you there," Cluny said, and then added, as though mischievously, "whether she done it or not."

"There can be no doubt," Caron said, pathetically. "The proofs are absolute—incontrovertible. She lured him to Quebec, she bought poison and candy. . . . If you will pardon me—the subject is not a pleasant one for me—I will not discuss it."

"What," Cluny said, disregarding the expostulation, "did she calc'late to git out of it?"

"Who knows? She hated the boy as he hated her. . . . One cannot account for human depravity, nor for the crimes to which long hatred will drive one. . . . But, pray, let us seek some other subject. . . . You are employed on the Caron properties, Mr. Steele?"

"So I am told."

"How do you find conditions there?"

"I have no complaints to make."

"Ah—I did not mean as to yourself. Rather I referred to the conditions of the operation. Does it seem to be going well?"

"I am not in a position to know."

Caron turned to Cluny with raised eyebrows. "But I thought—" he said.

"You see," Cluny interrupted, "Mr. Caron ain't very well acquainted with the pulp business, and, livin' so far off—"

"I would suggest," Donovan said, "that the manager at the mills would be able to give him full information."

Cluny chuckled.

Caron sat upright in his chair. His face was now all the man of affairs—with a suggestion of the sharp man of affairs.

"Mr. Steele," said he, "it is better to be frank. To fumble in the dark is a thing lacking efficiency. Cluny has told me about you at some length. He has suggested that you have

a reason of your own for burying yourself in the woods—which, of course, is no affair of mine. He has followed closely the things you have done since your arrival, and has studied your character."

"All of which," said Donovan, coldly, "does not endear Mr. Cluny to me noticeably."

"It is your character in which I am interested," said Caron. "For instance, it was interesting to me to learn that already you seem to have earned a name. Are you aware that the men call you Le Marcœur? The Bad Heart?"

"I was not aware of it," said Donovan.

"You seem, in a number of instances, to have earned it," said Caron, dryly.

"One name or another," said Donovan. "It is of no consequence."

"I am offering you an opportunity," said Caron.

"Of what nature?"

"To work for me—and if affairs progress as I hope—to do very well for yourself financially."

"I am working for you now," said Donovan.

"For the Caron family," corrected Xavier Caron. "I mean for myself—personally."

"There is a difference, then?"

"It is conceivable."

Donovan was conscious of a sense of satisfaction. He was on the trail of roguery. He was about to turn up to the eye of the sun chicanery and treachery, and he smiled.

"To my point of view," he said, dryly, "it would be inconceivable otherwise."

"I do not understand," Caron said, lifting his brows.

"It is no consequence. . . . And what am I to do?"

Cluny interrupted. "The' hain't no need to go too fast," he said. "It's runaway hosses that wrecks the buggy. And, on

the other hand, 'tain't wise to ride a hoss until you've bought him."

"True," said Caron. "Do you accept my proposition, Mr. Steele?" He named a pleasant sum of money as salary.

Donovan was enjoying himself. "But," he said, "I fail to see the necessity. If I am to be your man it is to work for your interests against the interests of the other members of your family—and as I understand it, they have ceased to be. The boy is dead and his sister is dead."

"She may not be dead," Caron said, in a voice which Donovan was to remember long. "Even if she be dead, it will take time to prove it—and, though you may not appreciate the fact, young man, the remuneration of a guardian is not so bountiful as to supply every need."

"But," said Donovan, "supposing, as you say, the girl is alive—what then?"

"It would be embarrassing—horribly embarrassing for me to see one of my family—one of my own flesh and blood—in a common prison as a murderess."

"But," Donovan persisted, "if you should discover her—happen upon her hiding place—what would you do?" He watched Caron's eyes. They glinted and became dangerous.

"If she is dead," Caron said, "or, if alive, she keeps herself concealed, then there is nothing to be done. . . . If I should find her—ah—that is a hard question. Love for a near relative balanced against duty as a citizen! I fancy, however, I should know how to act in the interests of all."

Donovan fancied the man spoke the truth, and that his actions for the benefit of all would not be such as to bring peace to Nérée Caron.

"Do you accept?" Caron asked, a second time.

"I agree with Cluny that too much haste is unwise. I will

sleep on it—perhaps discuss matters with Cluny—and you shall be informed."

"Promptly?" said Caron.

"Promptly," said Donovan.

Now Xavier Caron became the host, gracious, easy, looking to the comfort and enjoyment of his guests. He talked well, interestingly, easily, and Donovan set him down as a man of many sides, capable in each of them, a man to reckon with, a man who would have his way, though he must wait for it with patience. Caron discussed politics, topics of the day, the hotel, the weather, but, in the end, he said a thing, casually, which brought Donovan to tense attention.

"I've made an acquaintance here—a compatriot of yours, Mr. Steele, and a New-Yorker. An interesting character and agreeable companion. He had evinced extraordinary interest in the homespun fabrics of this locality, and in these rugs which are made by the women back on the farms. I have promised to show him the work at its best. It will be an agreeable day. To-morrow I am driving him out to the parish of Ste. Agnès, which, I understand, is the headquarters of the spinning—to show him the women at their looms and spinning-wheels."

To Ste. Agnès! . . . Nérée Caron was at Ste. Agnès, in the house of Odilon Turcot—where Xavier Caron would go first of all. Xavier Caron and his niece would meet! What then? . . . Donovan could not remember afterward the remainder of their call, nor could he call to mind taking leave of his host or what words had been exchanged. No. His mind was so crowded, so active with speculations, so vexed by the sort of problem he hoped never to have been called upon to face, that there was room for nothing else. It was in the carriage, on his way back to La Malbaie, that he came to himself.

"It's nothing to me," he said, aloud.

"What's that?" Cluny asked.

Donovan did not answer. He was remembering a small, fair, pitiful face, upturned to his in the darkness of Quebec's Lower Town; he was remembering a sweet voice begging him for succor . . . and he was remembering how he had instructed that apparition to apply for help to the river. . . .

Chapter *Ten*

SUNDAY morning saw Donovan Steele tramping the road toward Ste. Agnès; he was going there for a purpose, and this purpose was to witness the encounter between Xavier Caron and his niece. True, he had told himself it was none of his affair; true also that he had exerted his will to erase all thought of the matter from his mind, but the effort had been futile. Even as he started he told himself he was going elsewhere, pretended to himself that Ste. Agnès was not his destination. Nevertheless, he was within sight of the hamlet before the *habitants* returned from worship in the little church.

He walked up the road past Odilon Turcot's store, but no one was visible on the long piazza or in any window. For ten minutes he sat on a fence a couple of hundred yards beyond, and then he retraced his steps. This time he encountered the returning vehicle in which sat Odilon and Delima, in the front seat, and Madame Turcot and Nérée Caron behind. He felt their eyes upon him, saw Odilon's significant gesture, but did not lift his eyes from the dust nor acknowledge their existence by a word.

"It is that Bad Heart," said Odilon to his wife. "What does he seek in our village?"

"Such manners!" exclaimed Delima. "Did he not rest in our house and drink our milk? Is it, then, that we are not to be spoken to?"

"It is better that such a man does not speak," said Odilon. "May the saints keep him at a distance!"

"His face—it was not evil," said Madame. "Perhaps it is that lies have been told of him."

"I saw what I saw," said Odilon.

"But he stopped in our home, and did not harm. He sat alone in the room with ma'mselle, and no harm came to her, did it, little one?"

Nérée had turned, following Donovan with her eyes, until of a sudden he halted and faced about and their eyes met. Thereupon Nérée faced the front again with some loss of dignity. The sight of him recalled her to the constant menace under which she lived, for, as he had known her, so others might recognize her face. . . . And she had been happy, happy in a fancied security.

The simple, cleanly life of the people of Ste. Agnès was a medicine to her; their ways, their little affairs which seemed so important to them, their religion (which was not a matter of the Sabbath Day, but of every day and of every occasion), their thoughts and their manners—all soothed her. Not for an instant did she regret the life she had left behind her, or the society of those of her own class whom, she told herself, she was never to see again. A *habitant* maid she had become, and in it she delighted. Bitterness had not touched her with poisonous finger—as it had touched Donovan Steele. Her heart, instead of being hardened by treachery as was his, had become softer, gentler. Wrong and suffering had molded and refined and exalted her. Far from despising, hating mankind because she suffered at its hands, she loved the world and all it contained the better. And her faith in Heaven, which always had been of a fineness and depth, became sweeter, simpler, more admirable.

She did not ask life to adapt itself to her, but in every way adapted herself to it—so that, after these few weeks, she had become a part of Ste. Agnès, accepted by its people, as though she had been born within the limits of the parish. She was learning, and in her tasks she took a quaint, childlike interest. The great oven, built upon legs and covered with a clumsy roof,

was not merely a necessary adjunct to the house in her eyes. Madame Turcot had taught her, on the first baking day, the secret of the light, white bread—the ingredients which went into it, and the proper method of combining them. She sat by while Madame kindled the fire of wood in the cavern of the great oven, heating it so that the loaves would bake to an evenness, with top crusts of golden brown. Through the long vigil of the baking she had sat, patient, thinking such thoughts as came to her, and reflecting that those things which in life seem to the most desired are not most desirable, and of this she had spoken to Madame.

"Of a truth," said Madame Turcot, turning her fine, lined, handsome old face toward the girl; "you speak the truth. In youth I heard it from the *curé,* but in years I have learned it out of the things I have seen. One cannot buy happiness with gold. No. The happiness must come from within one's self. Is it not? Gold may buy a thing—but when you have bought it the thing remains but a thing unless you take pleasure in it. Nor is it the costliness which brings joy."

"I am happy here," said Nérée.

"And you shall learn the baking, so that your loaves shall be spoken of as highly throughout the countryside as mine."

"And that," said Nérée, "will make me happier yet."

"Also the spinning and weaving. It is something to see the fleece upon the sheep yonder, and to know that your hands are able to fashion it into cloth of strength and beauty. . . . That, also, you shall learn."

"Delima says I spin well even now," said Nérée, proudly.

"The more accomplishments a wife brings to her husband, the securer she will be in his love," said Madame, as one states a demonstrated fact. "Regard now, little one, beauty comes as a gift. It does its part, for does it not attract many men from whom to select? But man becomes accustomed to beauty

when he has housed it under his roof and it is constantly by him. Also it fades. But skill at the loom and a knowledge of the light loaf—these do not fade, nor does the husband's regard for them diminish.

"Love and a husband," said Nérée, "can never come to me."

Madame Turcot winkled her straight, slender nose. "Think you," she demanded, "the good God has created you as you are to let you waste like an apple left hanging on the tree?"

"But who will love me, and how may I marry any man?"

"Many will love you, *mignonne,* and he who desires you with the so great strength will find a way to have you. . . . A strength worthy of your beauty, little one. When such a man comes, then we shall see what we shall see."

So Nérée learned the baking and the spinning and the weaving, and forgot, while she was at her labors, the shadow which hung between her and the sun. For days at a time she did not remember—but to-day she remembered, reminded by the sight of Donovan Steele. She turned again to look, using skill that it should not be known that she looked, and saw Donovan standing in the middle of the sandy road, still peering after the carriage.

"Why did he come? Why is he here?" Nérée asked of herself, and, as any woman must do, wondered if herself was the magnet which drew him. What if it were? And what could this strange, cold man, who knew no God and hated his fellow men, want with her? . . . And yet—and withal—he was splendid to look upon, strong and straight and clean of eye! A man to look upon twice and to remember. . . . Le Malcœur! So young he was, and, if stories stretched their fabric over ribs of truth, dangerous and wicked and cruel. He was of her own world, and—something told her this truth—like her driven out of his world by something evil, something unbearable, something which had cut the cable of his anchor

and turned him adrift in an angry sea. . . . She did not look backward again, nor, when she alighted upon Odilon's porch, did she glance down the road. Nevertheless, she knew Donovan stood immobile where she last saw him—and she knew he was looking at her.

She ran into the house and up the stairs to the room which had been given her for her own, and, though she was frightened, as what girl would not be frightened by the thought that she had attracted a man such as Le Malcœur was said to be, she stood before her mirror and touched her hair lightly so that it snuggled to her brow here and curled gayly there—and she looked to the hanging of her frock and to the dust upon her shoes, and was as excited as she was frightened and as full of anticipation as she was of apprehension. . . . What if he should come to the door—to the big door downstairs—and ask for her? What then? . . . She would refuse to see him, of course. Of a surety. . . . Nevertheless, she turned before the mirror so that she could see her hair and judge if it were done in the back quite to her satisfaction.

While thus she demeaned herself as it is the nature of women to do, Donovan Steele stood midway between the fences, with his feet ankle-deep in dust, and stared, first at Odilon's house and then along the road toward La Malbaie. And as he stood he sneered at himself for taking interest in the affairs of any human being, even if that interest were of the sort he knew his to be—merely his curiosity, generated by his disgust for his fellows, to see how a man, convicted in his mind of treachery, and a woman guilty of crime, would act at an unexpected encounter.

Once he turned and walked a hundred yards toward La Malbaie, washing his hands of the matter—but it was a hundred yards only that he walked before he retraced his steps, nor did he pause until he stood on the foot-worn bit of ground

before Odilon's store. He could not make himself go, and, acknowledging his weakness, determined at least to make the best of it. If he were going to the play he would procure for himself a reserved seat. Resolutely he mounted Odilon's steps.

Madame Turcot peeped through the door, and Donovan lifted his hat.

"Madame," he said, "the day is warm. May I rest for a while in the shade here?"

"But certainly, m'sieu," she said, and thought to herself that this boy's manners were not, after all, so unspeakable. "And will you drink a glass of water?"

"Thank you," said Donovan.

She tripped into the house with that light, young step of hers, and whispered to Odilon in the kitchen: "He is here. He sits before the door."

"That man—that Bad Heart?"

"No other," said Madame. "I get him water to drink."

"And I," said Odilon, "I go to visit a neighbor. I care not to be trampled. I go quietly by the back way, and if he makes inquiry for me I do not return till nightfall."

His mother sniffed and returned to Donovan with water from the well, and as he spoke his thanks and lifted it to his lips she regarded him with her keen old eyes.

"I do not know the name of M'sieu," she said, tentatively.

"It is Steele," said Donovan.

"Stee-ul. . . . Oh. . . . Most difficult to say these names of the English. . . . But see, the sun comes and the horses have made the dust to fly in clouds. Within it is cooler and there are chairs."

Donovan returned her regard, and fine lines crinkled about her eyes as she smiled with that impishness which spry old age has sometimes on display. "I am sure," she said, "M'sieu

Stee-ul will not trample me as he did the man on the bridge." And then she laughed. The proceeding quite nonplused Donovan. "Because," said Madame, "you are a boy—no more—and so, doubtless, you have not the wickedness you hope you possess. . . . My son, Odilon—ah that I should be mother to a gossip and a mere maker of money!—has made himself to disappear. You need not look for him to eat, because he is hid." At which she looked fair into his face and laughed, and, for all that he was what he was, he was somewhat put to it not to join with her.

"Madame is merry," he said.

"And why not, by example! I have seventy years already, and but few remain. Shall I weep and sorrow and refuse the pleasure which is the just debt they owe me?"

He sat down in the chair she indicated, and was silent for a time, gazing through the open window down the road, where a cloud of dust would betray the approach of team or motor. Presently he looked up and found Madame Turcot's bright eyes upon him.

"Your granddaughter—or is it your niece?" he asked, "is she still of your family?"

"Without doubt," said Madame; "you failed to see her as we passed you in the road."

Donovan made no answer, but hoped he had not flushed. This was a most disconcerting old lady. He cleared his throat. "I would see her if I may," he said—and it was not at all what he had intended saying.

"That," said Madame, "is for her to determine." She left the room with her accustomed briskness and mounted the stairs. "Eh, little one," she said, roguishly, "there is one below asking for you—great, handsome boy."

"Is it—"

"This wicked eater of men from whom Odilon flies like a goose from a wolf."

"I do not wish to see him."

"Then," said Madame, "I will send him away."

"But wait." Madame's eyes twinkled. "Perhaps—it may be it will be best for me to—send him away. For a reason."

"Undoubtedly for a reason," said Madame. "Go you down and let your reason do its best."

It was no *habitant* girl who descended the stairs, but a dignified, self-contained young person who was well able to conceal her eager interest in this unusual situation under a surface of reserved courtesy. Nérée Caron was no stranger to the ways of a polite world—her début was already a season behind her—but never, in the splendid old house in Montreal, had she descended to meet a caller with the sensations she felt to-day. Somehow there was something significant about this call, apart from the disturbing one that Donovan Steele was aware of her identity. There was a quality about this young man different from the quality of the callers to whom she had been accustomed. He intrigued her as they had not done—but that was not for him to see. . . . She entered the room with a manner which the coarse clothing she wore did not lessen.

"You wished to see me?" she asked.

"No," said Donovan, arising, his face still and forbidding.

Nérée lifted her brows. "I understood that you asked for me. If it was a mistake—"

"I asked for you," he said.

"And yet you did not wish to see me?"

"No."

"That," she said, "is a trifle difficult to understand."

"I do not understand it myself," he said.

"Was there something you wished to say to me?" she asked, helpfully.

"Nothing," he said.

She was bewildered—but she did not want to go. There was, she felt, some reason for his coming. Something, instinct told her, underlay that strangeness of manner. She stepped farther into the room.

"If you do not wish to see me and have nothing to say to me, to what do I owe this call?" she asked.

"To weakness of will," he said, and shrugged his shoulders. "I had no intention of coming to Ste. Agnès, and, having come, I did not intend to speak with you. But here I am. I do not like it. Doubtless you do not like it. . . . I think I can, with safety, promise never to do so again."

"Why are you so sure?"

"Because," he said, "to-morrow I go so far away from here that it will be no easy journey back."

"You speak," she said, "as if my presence here were driving you away."

"It is," he said, sharply.

"And why?" Color mounted to her cheeks and a glint flicked in her eyes as she spoke. Nérée Caron was not without a temper of her own.

"Because," he said, "you are interesting, and I want to be interested in no woman."

"And why, pray, am I interesting?"

"As a contradiction," he said. "Because you look everything that is good, and are"—he lifted his shoulders again—"what you are."

"What am I?" The question was a demand, and now her eyes flashed warning.

"A criminal and a fugitive from justice."

"That," she said, "is a wicked lie." Then, all in an instant, her mood changed from outrage and anger to grief and terror and lovely pitifulness. "Oh, it *is* a lie! I did not do it! I did

not! . . . Why should I have harmed my brother? Why? You cannot give me a reason. . . . I tell you *he* did it! He did it for his own wicked purpose, and because he is cunning and evil no one will ever prove it. . . . Oh, I tell you I did not do it, and you must believe me! . . . It is ghastly, horrible, to know that people believe I could—poison my own brother. . . ."

Donovan regarded her, and his lips twisted into a sneer. "He, you say. *He* did it. What he?"

"My uncle, Xavier Caron," she said.

"Which you can prove," Donovan suggested, ironically.

"No. . . . No. . . ."

"But your uncle, Xavier Caron, can prove that you *did*," he said, "and seems to have rather the best of the controversy."

"Did you come here to torture me?"

"That was not my intention."

"And you will not believe me—not when I swear it before God and all the saints?"

"Not against the evidence."

"False evidence—manufactured evidence."

"But conclusive," he said.

"You—you coward! You are despicable, to come here and play with me like this. To stoop, because you know my secret, to force yourself into my presence, knowing I dare not refuse to see you, and taunt me."

"So you wouldn't dare refuse to see me? Why?"

"Does a man like you need to be told?"

"What sort of man am I?" he asked, and with real curiosity.

"I—I don't know."

He opened his lips to speak other words, but his eyes saw, through the window, an approaching motor. It was coming, speeding toward them through a haze of billowing dust. Donovan smiled grimly and turned to scrutinize Nérée. In

a matter of minutes Xavier Caron would be here, would alight and enter this room. And here he and his niece would meet face to face. It would be a spectacle, a play in human emotions, a disclosure of characters well worth seeing and many times worth remembering.

"Will you go now?" she asked.

"Not yet," he said, his eyes on the approaching car.

"Then I shall," she said.

"Wait." It was a command, imperative. She felt that, should she attempt to leave the room, he would seize and detain her, and for the first time she was afraid of him. What did this mean? . . . She was seeing him now in that cold ruthlessness which Odilon had described, and she knew why Odilon feared him. . . . She gave back a step, but he remained motionless. Nérée stared into his face, saw the color ebb from it, saw his eyes narrow, his lips contract to white lines. . . . His broad, splendid shoulders drew together and his fingers opened and shut as if he engaged in physical struggle with some invisible antagonist. . . . He saw the car stop before the door. . . .

Then, with a suddenness which struck terror to her heart, Nérée felt herself seized in Donovan's arms, saw his working face close to her face, felt his palm pressed tightly over her lips.

"Be still," he whispered, harshly. "The back way. . . . The back way. . . ."

In the kitchen he uncovered her lips an instant. "Is there a shed, a barn, where you can hide?"

"Yes," she answered, and he carried her through the rear door, leaped from the porch, and ran to the open barn. In its shelter he set her down and backed away from her. His eyes blazed so that she felt the heat of his hatred of her.

"See what you've done!" he panted. "See what you've done!"

"Done! What do you mean? How dare you touch me?"

"I—I didn't mean to," he said, uncertainly, as if abruptly awakened from deep sleep and not altogether aware of surroundings and events. "I came to see—not to meddle—not to warn you or to save you. . . . I— It was none of my affair. . . . I didn't intend to do this."

"Intend to do what?" she asked, apprehensive of his manner, which bordered upon wildness.

"Snatch you away from Xavier Caron," he said. "He's in that car."

"My uncle!"

"Xavier Caron."

"He—he knows I am here?"

"No."

"Then—why did he come?"

Donovan was mastering himself and could smile saturninely. "To buy homespuns for a friend," he said.

"But you—you knew he was coming?"

"I heard him say so."

She regarded him afresh, and her eyes were not harsh, not angry, but curious—and soft and grateful.

"You knew—and you came to—to save me from him."

"I did not. I came to watch. . . ."

She laid her hand gently on his arm and said a thing which sounded strange and startling in his ears. "You poor boy," she whispered.

He brushed her hand from his arm. "It was a weakness," he said, harshly. "I was right in fearing you. I'm right in going away. . . ."

"Mr. Steele," she said, "I thank you. There is no more I can say, but wherever you go, whatever you do, my gratitude

will be with you—and my prayers." She paused and searched his face for something not easy to find. "I think you need my prayers, for you are more unfortunate than I."

"I?" he laughed harshly.

"Yes," she said. "Because as to me, men think I am wicked, but as to you, you think all men are evil. . . . And that is a dreadful thing to think and a dreadful thought by which to live."

"Hush!" he said.

Women and men are dissimilar in this—among many other noteworthy differences—that a woman is not contented to benefit by a fact, she must afterward ask the reason for its being. Nérée Caron was intensely feminine.

"Why," she whispered, "if you believe me guilty, did you hide me from Uncle Xavier?"

"Because," said Donovan, "I'm a fool. . . ."

It was an hour before the dust of Xavier Caron's automobile disappeared toward La Malbaie and Donovan and Nérée dared emerge from the shelter of the barn. During a large part of that time no word had passed between them, for Donovan had withdrawn to a distance from her and sat upon a box, his head upon his cupped hands and his face hidden. . . . Nérée had been content to watch him and to reflect. At last, hearing the sound of the started engine, he arose and watched, and presently announced that it was safe to emerge.

Nérée extended her hand. "Let me thank you again," she said.

Donovan did not touch her hand. "It was not a matter for thanks," he said, bitterly.

"For what, then?"

"For fear," he said. "I find I am not yet able to depend upon myself as I thought. . . . It was you who did it." His voice was accusing, filled with displeasure.

"If I have made you perform a gracious act," she said, "I am happy."

"However," he said, "I need not fear a recurrence. I have seen you for the last time."

"In that case," she said, gravely, "good-by, Mr. Steele. I shall always remember you with gratitude."

"And I," he said, "shall forget you with all possible promptness."

When he was gone, striding down the road, Nérée smiled.

Chapter *Eleven*

Donovan Steele was ashamed, as a virtuous man would be of breaking one of the major Commandments; he had not been true to himself, and had weakly disregarded the first rule laid down by himself for the conduct of his life. This rule was to go about his own concerns and to prosecute his own ends without heeding the needs or the desires or the emergencies of others. He would turn aside for none, and all should turn aside for him. Now in the first crisis he had meddled, and, most humiliating, most alarming of all, had meddled to avert disaster from a woman!

Once in camp, he packed his turkey methodically while Leandre Savard watched him apprehensively but silently, for Leandre had learned not to speak to Donovan when the mood of silence was upon him. Presently Donovan lifted his head to glance curiously at his companion. His gaze lingered. Then he spoke, nor could he have told what impelled him, for certainly he had not intended to say such words.

"We are quitting this job," he said.

"We! But why? *Nom d'un chien!* Why should we quit?"

"Because I wish it," said Donovan.

"To go where? Is there another job?"

"I don't know where we are going, and there are always jobs."

"But consider!" Leandre was torn between strong oxen. "There is Odilie to be thought of. We are to marry in the spring—she and I—and every day's wages are of an importance. I save. This is no time for me to wander about as if I were enlisted in the *Chassé Galerie. Nom de Dieu!* What would you?"

Donovan shrugged his shoulders. That was all. Then without a word of good-by he lifted his turkey and strode out of the bunk house. Leandre's eyes followed him, doglike in their yearning and their apprehension.

"But wait. . . . *Eh, bien!* What is a day? Wait, *mon camarade,* I come." And Leandre commenced to scramble together his belongings. Donovan waited impatiently, for he was urged to be on the road, to be putting distance between him and this spot—this dangerous spot which dragged at him and sought to enmesh him in the troubled affairs of others. . . . It was a flight.

This was the fashion of Donovan's going; so in this inconspicuous and casual manner began the Odyssey of Donovan Steele and Leandre Savard, and before the end of it was arrived at, the old fox of Utica would not have shamed to hail them as fit companions, worthy to share his song. It was a wandering which led them into remote and desolate resting spots; through dark and lonely forests, along the scarce, explored banks of unnamed streams. They saw the forming of ice in the Peribonka, labored on the great dam at Chicoutemi, traveled by canoe on the Mistassini, took wages of the great mills on Ha Ha Bay—and, strange to say, Leandre lost no money by his wandering, for, it appeared, Donovan had a knack for turning dollars. Roberval knew the pair of them, and Tadousac, long after the last tourist had gone southward, was convinced of their quality. And the tale of their doings rolled up behind them like a great snowball. Le Malcœur and his dog, they were called, and stories sprang up about them, to be told around winter firesides, as ice crystals appear upon the face of a lake at the touch of frost.

It was a life of harshness, calculated to set and harden the cement of a man. Merciless nature opposed them at every turn, and, it seemed, Donovan Steele studied the ways of nature

and emulated them. The summer and the winter completed him, touched him with a master's finishing hand, until he was what he had hoped to be. There must have resided in him, quiescent, a singular adaptability for the woods and the barrens and the mountains and the snows. It seemed, almost, that he did not have to learn, but knew by some mysterious prescience; and as for his body, it was fashioned for the emergencies it encountered as a canoe is fashioned to pass through the white water of rock-studded rapids. He ceased to be a boy, even in appearance, and was at all points a man—and whatever might be said in disparagement of his heart, this was commonly admitted. Le Malcœur was a man—a terrible man, a man to pass silently, a man to give the width of the roadway to—but for all that a man. And because of this a grudged admiration followed him, and men boasted that a week ago they had seen him and his dog, and talked of the sight for weeks thereafter.

Strange and awesome stories trickled down to the great river—stories of daring, in which this Le Malcœur shook his fist at the worst nature threatened; stories of self-centered disregard of the existence and the rights of others; stories of ruthlessness and of cruelty—hard, bitter tales of a man who knew no peace, no rest, no God, and no friend.

But as these stories filtered into Tadousac and La Malbaie and Chicoutemi and Roberval a connoisseur of such matters might have noted that, evil as they were upon their hard, chill surfaces, there was no mention of woman wronged or of acts committed in liquor. It seemed that Le Malcœur hated women and liquor alike. Also he was not given to evil language—rather he was given to little language of any sort. No, he was silent and dangerous.

Beside these things, he was known as the man who dared to sneer at God.

In your great, populated, civilized centers this is no great thing. Men cluster so closely together, and are so interdependent, so necessary, and, quite without wishing to be so, so helpful to one another, that God seems to have withdrawn to a distance and to become intangible and vague. Here men derive their benefits from one another and from themselves; their peace and protection come from the police force, and the safety of their journeys depends upon the efficiency of those who operate railroad trains. Their food comes from the grocer's and their clothing from the department store. Water flows from a tap and everything is mechanical and purchasable for money. The running of the world seems quite taken out of the hands of deity and handed over to elective officers and general managers of corporations. . . . But in those regions just to the south of mighty Ungava quite other facts dominate the life of the scanty population, wherefore God draws nearer, becomes an entity, and carries on as he did before the days of invention and skepticism.

Yes, indeed, God is very real to those descendants of French pioneers, and the saints are very near and invaluable. One would as soon forget his paddles when setting out on a journey as his beads, and a medal, blessed by the priests who minister in the shrine of Ste. Anne, is more greatly prized than credit at the butcher's can ever be in the city of New York. It is through the compassion of God and the intercession of the saints that one completes in safety a long journey through winter woods. If game falls before the rifle when starvation stalks white through the snow, it is a gift from Heaven for which Heaven must be thanked. . . . The thing is logical. Where men need God they find him; where gas meters take the place of the book of the Recording Angel and miracles are performed by a physical force called electricity, men lose their Deity. Perhaps this is as it should be. This is a large and

demanding universe, and it may be the Creator and Ruler of it is willing it should be so. It enables him to concentrate.

Wherefore, when Donovan Steele sneered at God he did a noteworthy and fear-inspiring thing. It marked him. It endowed him with a certain evil fearlessness.

There was the story of how Donovan had asked for work for himself and Leandre at a certain mill far to the north, when, upon being told that the roll was complete and no jobs were to be had, he waited until evening and then created vacancies. This desirable end he effected by selecting first one and then another man of size and reputation and incapacitating them for further labor for weeks to come in fair fight. Next morning he applied again, smiling saturninely, saying he learned there had occurred sudden vacancies. The resident manager did not boggle over the details, for he was not a man of his hands. This thing happened early in the wanderings, but noise of it traveled ahead, so that when Donovan and Leandre appeared and asked for work there seldom had to be fighting before it was given him.

"Full up," an employer informed him a few weeks later.

"What two men do you need least?" Donovan asked, evenly; and when the man named them Donovan awaited their leisure, bore down upon them.

"Hilaire Lapointe and Armias Lessard?" he asked.

"*Oui,* m'sieu."

"My companion and I take your jobs in the morning," he said.

Hilaire blustered and bristled, but Armias plucked at his sleeve and whispered in his ear, "It has the sound of Le Malcœur and his dog," whereat the bluster went out of Hilaire, so that he became meticulously courteous as he asked, "Is it M'sieu Le Malcœur I have the honor to encounter?"

"I have been called that," said Donovan, and in the morn-

ing Hilaire and Armias were no longer of the population of that place.

Also it was related (and whether this be true history or able invention is not known) that on an occasion Donovan required a canoe where none was for sale. Donovan, however, selected a craft suitable to his needs and bargained with its owner, who would not agree to a sale. In the affair that ensued Donovan is related to have broken the man's right arm with deliberation.

"A man with a broken arm," he said, "has no need for a canoe which he cannot use. . . . But one with a broken neck has less."

The owner sold, and, as always was reported, Donovan paid scrupulously a fair price. He was no cheat and no thief, as all men admitted, though his methods of bargaining were not always to the taste of those with whom he bargained.

Also, sometimes, as must be the case when a man achieves for himself such a reputation as accompanied Donovan, there are local celebrities whose honor demands a disputing of it, and more than once champions who thought well of their prowess picked fights with him to put the matter to the issue. As notable men fell before him, his repute as a fighter grew, until he stood in isolation—or until, as came to be the fact, men mentioned his name in a breath with Cluny's and speculated upon which would have the best of it.

For the man Cluny, before the coming of Donovan, had been talked of and feared and admired throughout the length and breadth of that great country.

"That would be a sight," said this man and that. "Cluny and Le Malcœur!"

In all these wanderings Leandre Savard accompanied Donovan, but he did not harden to the country's demand as did his

companion. He remained always the same, and if he had one object in life it was to find points from which letters could be sent to his Odilie. Letters from Odilie he could not hope to receive, for their movements were so frequent, so without notice, that time never elapsed between the sending of a letter and their departure for some distant destination sufficient to permit a word to be received in return.

Why Donovan clung to Leandre is an inexplicable phenomenon, but cling to him he did. Was it loneliness demanding a companion? Was it the pleasure of absolute command over a fellow man such as he exercised? It is impossible to say. Nor did he give to Leandre what Leandre lavished upon him. His manner toward Leandre was not even contemptuous—it was toleration. He allowed Leandre to come with him, and that was all—except that it was his whim to see to it Leandre did not lose money by his fidelity. . . . In the spring, if he still desired, Leandre could marry his Odilie, for his savings would be greater than as if he had remained stolidly at work in the camp beyond La Chute.

As always, Leandre talked—the simple interests, the simple faith, the homely ambitions which were his. He spoke much more frequently of Odilie as spring approached, and of her loneliness through the months of separation, and of her fidelity, of which he seemed to have no question. He described how they would be married by the *curé* and how, between them, they would be rich enough to buy a little plot of ground, which, through frugality and hard labor, would soon increase itself to a farm. And there would be children. Of this he was very certain, and once, in a moment when Donovan seemed more approachable than common, he said, "And the first son—it will be a son, m'sieu—he shall he named after you, and for a second name he shall have that of the good saint who

carried the sweet Jesus over the river—St. Christophe. Is m'sieu pleased?"

"After me, you will name him, eh? And by what name, Leandre? Shall you call him Le Malcœur?"

"Not so," Leandre said in a voice of gentle reproof. "That is not a good name for a child."

"And for a man?"

"That is a matter for argument," said Leandre, tactfully. "But m'sieu did not choose the name. Idle tongues fastened it upon him."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders. "But suppose," he said, "your Odilie has not waited for you? The time has been long. If a richer man came wooing, Leandre—"

"My Odilie is true as the angels."

"But," Donovan urged, impelled by a strange curiosity to probe into the man's heart, "what if she were untrue? What if she had deceived you? What then, *mon brave?* How would you conduct yourself?"

"Once before," said Leandre, with simple dignity, "m'sieu asked the same question, and I answer him now as then—that there is no answer because the thing is impossible."

"If she has not deceived you by the spring, she will before the fall—or before some spring," Donovan said, shortly.

"M'sieu does not know. He is mistaken. Because some one evil person has deceived m'sieu he makes to believe that all are evil and of a treachery." This was venturing far for Leandre, but he took the risk open-eyed.

"One!" said Donovan, fiercely, and for an instant the cold glint of passion flicked from his eyes. "One! . . . All—fidelity and friendship and gratitude and honor are words—words. They were given us to play with. That is it, Leandre. . . . Would you set a child down to play with hot coals? No. But

those words are worse than hot coals, *mon brave*. . . . And this God of yours sits by and laughs while we play with them and burn our fingers."

This was the sort of talk which passed between Leandre and Donovan, and neither was able to convince the other of his point of view. It seems a thing impossible that two men could be in constant association with each other, day and night, without effecting some modification in each other's characters and thoughts, but with these two it seemed to be so. It is certain Donovan's bitterness did not affect his companion. . . . If Leandre's simplicity and faith and happiness and unflagging fidelity affected Donovan, there were scant tokens of it to be observed.

With the opening of the great river the companions found themselves in Tadousac. Something, some mysterious urge, had been drawing Donovan southward toward the river. Each move he made had been in that direction—each move had been made in obedience to an irresistible urge which he hesitated to analyze. Perhaps he knew and perhaps he was ignorant of the truth that he was being drawn to La Malbaie—to La Chute—to Ste. Agnès. Reluctantly and by slow stages he was going back to the spot whence he had fled. It was a magnet, drawing, always drawing—and it derived its force from not one, but several, elements.

Cluny was there. . . . Now it may seem strange that this was an element, but from the day when Donovan first encountered the big man on the train he had felt a sort of obligation. A challenge had passed between them, half spoken, but wholly understood. They two must try it out. It was settled that there must be conflict between them . . . and this situation was becoming acute by reason of the talk of the country. Le Malcœur and Cluny! Always a coupling of the names and a smacking of the lips. . . . It was a huge country,

but there was not in it space enough to contain the pair without collision. . . . Donovan knew Cluny expected him some day, and Donovan knew he could not disappoint Cluny if he would.

A second element which drew Donovan was curiosity. He felt himself to be strong, hardened by the months of wandering and daring and working and fighting. He knew himself to be a better man than when he took flight, a man nearer to the ideal he had set for himself. But whether he had arrived at his ideal, whether he were the emotionless, cold, ruthless being of his intentions, could not be proved until the strength were put to the supreme test. . . . And this test was the proximity of Nérée Caron! Could he meet her, be close to her, and not fear her? This was a matter upon which he had speculated on many bitter nights beside dying fires. Had he so fortified himself as to be indifferent to her beauty, her problem, her virtue, or her wickedness? Until this question was answered in the affirmative he would not know ease of mind or confidence in self.

Combined with these things was a homing instinct. It was in La Malbaie that he had in reality begun his new life—and therefore it drew him—but there was something else, something occult, something not to be defined by words or touched by the senses or analyzed by logic. It was a feeling that he must go to La Malbaie to meet an event . . . that the climax of his life awaited him there and he could not escape from it. . . . This, more than any other element, drew him ever away from the gulf at the mouth of the river, ever up its broad waters nearer and always nearer to that decisive battleground. . . . But this he did not see, that he would be led farther than La Malbaie or Ste. Agnès. That, before his wanderings were done and his problems solved, he must go still farther, revisit a spot he had known but briefly, and there do and be done by as was, perhaps, required from the beginning. . . . He did not

know that his epic could not be completed until that strange, bewildering, blasting chapter should be written in the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré. . . .

Toward this point his steps ever tended from this hour onward until all was accomplished.

Chapter Twelve

Just as those long months had been months of development and of strengthening for Donovan Steele, so had they been for Nérée Caron—and months of illumination and broadening and deepening besides. As Donovan, feeding the dull-glowing fires of his bitterness had become more grimly, relentlessly bitter, Nérée had also nourished her soul, but with more wholesome food. Derelict she had been, a dainty craft torn from its mooring in safe, pleasant harbor and set adrift on strange, stormy, rock-strewn seas. Charts she had none, nor a knowledge of buoys and lights. All she had for equipment was a steadfast faith in the builder who had fashioned her and a capacity for adaptation which was higher and better than resignation.

It would be idle to say of her that she was resigned. She was not resigned, though at times she was close to the border line of despair. No being with her strength of heart, her resolution, her innate, God-given sturdiness could be resigned under wrong such as she was compelled to bear. It was rather that she made the best of matters and took from life what she could snatch while awaiting with faith the opportunity which would set matters right.

It is perhaps strange that she harbored no brooding thoughts of revenge against her Uncle Xavier. She despised him, but she did not hate him. Rather she ignored him in her thoughts. True, if she were to be set right with the world his crime and his treachery must be exposed, but she had no desire to expose it merely for the sake of punishing him. It was an essential to her own rehabilitation. . . . In Nérée, even during

her darker moments, was none of the bitterness which clutched and controlled Donovan.

It seemed rather that her own trouble had taught her how to know the depths of the troubles of others, and, far from hating her fellow men, she approached nearer to them than she had ever been, than the circumstances of her old life would have permitted her ever to step. She had been an aristocrat of the aristocrats, sheltered, class conscious; not deliberately selfish, but, rather, ignorant. One as rich as she, as lovely and gifted as she and as sought after and flattered, could be expected to know little of the actualities involved in life upon this planet. . . . But she was learning now, and the daily lessons were engrossing. She loved the study as a genius may love his art. . . . And day by day her understanding and sympathy broadened as comprehension made a heart, already gracious, softer, more human, more impressionable.

One might have thought her days would be monotonous, after the old gayety and excitement of Montreal—but they were not dull to her. The baking was an adventure, the spinning and weaving fascinating innovations, the housework, of which she insisted upon doing her part, was far from drudgery. . . . And as for the people among whom her life had dropped, she loved them.

Nérée possessed qualities which would not permit her to remain inconspicuous. Just as, in the theatricals of the Montreal Junior League, she had stood out so that the rest of the company was little more than a background for her, so she began to assume significance and position in Ste. Agnès. She possessed what her *habitant* neighbors lacked: experience of the outside world, an education of breadth, and a keen, cultivated intelligence. With this equipment she could not mingle with her neighbors and fail to become dominant.

And so her fame spread. Not for her beauty alone, though that was sufficient to set kindly tongues to wagging in a land where the loveliness of woman is sung to the same tune as the strength and boldness of men, but for her ability and wisdom.

When Grand'mère Tremblay fell ill in the night and no doctor was to be had, Nérée, aroused with the rest, took charge of the matter as if by right, and brought order out of confusion and alarm. In the convent which had educated her, nursing had been thought fit knowledge for the gently born, and now this skill came into play. Of all in the hamlet, Nérée alone knew what to do, and did it with calm gentleness. . . . And the tale of this was broadcasted through a brace of parishes. Consequently, when Hector Dufour was kicked by his horse, Nérée was summoned without thought of anybody else, because, first, she was there, and, second, a doctor would cost money.

Then, when the teacher in the school fell ill, Nérée took charge of the children, and, as everybody said, with waggings of the head, she taught them better than the sick one had done. She was able to talk with the *curé* on subjects not to be ventured upon by the commonality, and the *curé* let be known his opinion that she was wise and of understanding heart—which was an important thing.

Thus, before the summer was gone, Nérée was nursing the sick, overseeing the care of the babies, and doing countless efficient kindnesses to her neighbors—and all in so sweet and simple a manner that not even Hubert Boulaine, who was forever finding fault with everybody and imputing motives for every act, dared accuse her of putting on airs.

As for the young men of the parish, their senses quite took leave of them in her presence and bashfulness overcame them, and the bravest of them all dared not present himself at Odilon Turcot's for the purpose of paying court.

One thing she did, which led to unexpected results and brought a train of risks not to be foreseen at the beginning—and this had to do with the homespuns and with the hook rugs which were the gainful occupation of the women of the parish.

"Odilon," she asked one day, "do the women hereabouts make money by their weaving?"

"As much," said Odilon, "as is good for them."

"And who," demanded Nérée, with a little smile, "says how much is good? Is it, perhaps, one Odilon Turcot, *marchand?*"

"It is," said Odilon, "an affair of commerce." He puffed up and was extremely important. "Many things enter into such a transaction which no woman may hope to understand."

"Truly?" Nérée eyed him with spurious admiration. "It is indeed a great thing to be a man and a *marchand,* is it not?"

"To be a man is good fortune. To become a merchant with successes is another matter. That, by example, needs one with more inside his head than cabbage."

"Do you think I could learn these mysteries, Odilon?"

"My advice," Odilon said, grandly, "is that you pay attention to your nursing and your spinning. It is for such matters the good God created women."

"Aye," teased Nérée, "and also for the purpose of running about the village to find merchants when people come to see them on matters of importance."

"To mingle with one's neighbors," bridled Odilon, "is of the very essence of business. So one forestalls competitors."

"Ah, then there is a competitor in Ste. Agnès." Nérée pretended to look up and down the street. "I do not see the sign over his door—or can it be the *forgeron!* Perhaps he has installed a stock of groceries."

"I will have you know," Odilon said, severely, "that I am not one to be made ridiculous. . . . No. Ask of anyone who

is the big man of this village. Go you. Ask the first neighbor you meet."

"That is so," Nérée said, "and because of it I come to you when I wish to be informed. Now, Odilon, tell me about the homespuns, or I will tell Delima to keep all onion from the stew for thirty days."

"What, then, do you want to know?"

"How the women market their cloth."

"That is easy. They bring it to me and I set a price. This they accept and trade out the sum in the store—"

"So that you make a double profit," Nérée said, admiringly.

"Truly. Then I carry the cloth to La Malbaie and sell it to M'sieu Lapointe, who owns the big store, and he, in turn, sells it to tourists in the summer, and to shops and stores in distant places. Aye—the homespuns of Ste. Agnès are known in such places as Montreal and Quebec, I can assure you."

"But," said Nérée, "if the women could sell at once, and themselves, to these distant shops, then they, and not others, would take the several profits of you and M'sieu Lapointe and others. Is it not so?"

"It is true, but they do not know the manner of it, nor, indeed, have they ever heard the names of these so-distant stores. Why, little one, even Odilon Turcot would not be able to accomplish it."

Now it was by chance that Nérée remembered how she had seen the fabrics of La Malbaie in Montreal shop windows advertised at a price, not twice, but even ten times as great as the women sometimes received for them from Odilon, and this gave her something to think about, and she procured numerous samples of patterns and weaves and colors and mailed them to a great store in New York city, asking for their opinion of them and if there would be a ready market for such wares in quantity. Also she set a price which would have

made the women of Ste. Agnès lift their hands and open their mouths with astonishment. And after two weeks she received an answer, which was much as she had expected it to be. Then she went again to Odilon.

"If you average all the yards of cloth you buy in a season, Odilon, how much do you make on each yard?"

"It would not be an easy thing to determine," he told her.

"And it is true you do not buy all the homespuns the women make. Some goes to La Malbaie, some to St. Irénee—and to other places."

"It is true."

"Now, supposing *all* the fabrics passed through your hands. All. And you did not buy it, but acted merely as the agent for the women who weave; and supposing for your so-valuable services they paid you a sum, shall we say five cents out of every dollar they received. Would you not be richer in the end?"

"It may be so."

"Then," said Nérée, "that is what you will do very soon when all is ready."

After this, in addition to her nursing and her tending of babies, she became a missionary of commerce, and by dint of much talk, but more because of the confidence all in the parish felt in her wisdom and her cleverness, she organized the women into a guild of sorts, so that none should sell her product, or should do otherwise with it than bring it to Nérée Caron—who, using the name and style of Odilon Turcot—sold it for them in Montreal and in New York for prices greater than had ever come to them in dreams induced by too much eating of sweets.

Now this accomplishment brought her new fame, and she became known to men who, otherwise, would have continued in ignorance of her existence. Among these was M'sieu La-

pointe, who did not like the arrangement at all, but who, nevertheless, could not restrain his admiration for the cleverness which conceived and carried it out. And M'sieu Lapointe was a great talker, with many opportunities to talk, for *habitants* drove in to his store from considerable distances.

Among those to whom he talked was Cluny.

"Ah," said m'sieu, "this niece of Odilon Turcot, there is a girl for you. Had I but wed with such a one and I would be a man of wealth and position. Look you what she has done." And he described her feat at length and glowingly. "And, besides," he said, "it is reported she is more beautiful than any girl in seven parishes. This I do not know, because I have not seen her. Never has she visited La Malbaie. But all make the same report. . . . Now, I would like well to see this girl."

"The less, my friend, you look at clever women, the more soundly you will sleep," said Cluny, morosely, and he went out of the store, but he did not forget, for he was a man to whom women are interesting, and the more desirable the report of them the more interesting they become. As Leandre Savard had once said to Donovan Steele, Cluny's object was money and women, and he pursued the one as he pursued the other—in any manner which seemed to guarantee its acquisition. . . . At the moment, which was late autumn, he was finding a certain girl troublesome and importunate. Therefore, the moment was apt for a successor to appear.

But Nérée Caron was not aware that such a being as Cluny helped to make up the population of the universe, and had she known it she would have given it little thought, for she was busy.

But to think of one man she did find time, or time found itself. Since that day when Donovan Steele snatched her from Odilon's dining room to the concealment of the barn he had

been present in her thoughts with greater frequency than he deserved—and, too, there were numerous reminders of him, for Odilon curiously regarded Donovan as in some sort his property. He was Odilon's wicked man, and no story floated down to Ste. Agnès that Odilon did not seize eagerly and bear home. Nor in the retailing of them to his family did he seek to build Donovan into a hero, nor to soften the harshness and austerity of the acts credited to his performance. He seemed to dislike Donovan with a strange bitterness, as if the boy had done something to him besides frightening him half out of his wits by merely appearing at his door. It became a monomania with him to abuse Donovan, and to hope, day by day, that his unconscious enemy would meet with some champion who would destroy him utterly.

Nérée listened to these tales silently, without protest or defense, and they grieved her—not because of the grimness of the acts themselves, but because of what they told her of the doer. At such times she remembered his face, first as she had seen it that terrible night in Quebec's dark and narrow streets—how wild it had been, how hopeless, how blasted. It had stamped itself upon her memory as the face of a man who looked into the very eyes of despair . . . and then she recalled it as she had seen it in Odilon's dining room, sharp lined, bronzed, handsome, young, but cold, harsh, forbidding. She considered these two faces, and told herself that the second was the offspring of the first, that some dreadful thing had crashed headlong into the life of Donovan Steele, smashing it, twisting it, disfiguring it until nothing recognizable remained. . . . Upon what that dreadful thing could have been she often speculated, and, woman-like, wondered if it could have been a woman.

And she remembered how, in spite of himself, he had befriended her; how he did what he did because he could not

restrain himself from the doing of it—and, she told herself—in that moment and in that action the real man had emerged and shown his face for an instant. She thought often, too, of his words to her, significant words for a man to utter to a woman—that he was going away from that place because of her. He was taking flight because he feared her nearness. . . . There was but one reason why such a man could fear the nearness of any woman, and Nérée thought about this reason also, and, though she did not do so willingly, she took pleasure in it. . . . After all, it is something to know that such a man as La Malcœur fears your propinquity.

And more. . . . She had smiled as he left her and strode down the dusty road; she had smiled at him, tolerantly, as one smiles at some vagary of a child. In after days she wondered greatly at the smile and the manner of it and the reason for it—but the reason was this, that silently, in her heart and secretly, she had said, "You will return," and so saying, she had known—*known*—that she spoke truth. Donovan Steele would return some day. It was written.

But there was a question she never asked of herself, and that was, what his return would mean to her. She avoided this inquiry meticulously. . . . The asking and the answering of it could have made her no happier—and possibly no more miserable. The only human relationships which could ever be hers were hers now. None could be added to them. . . . Suppose she had told herself that Donovan Steele would return to her as a lover, desiring her, driven back to her by the demand of his heart. What could she then have said to herself but that it did not matter. . . . What had she, a fugitive, under the accusation of a horrid crime, to do with love and lovers?

Thus, with much labor and much kindness, and great charity of heart and sweetness bestowed upon her neighbors; with hours of dread, and hours of hope, with nights of prayer—

but always with a firm, sweet, simple, admirable belief that all the world was good, and that God and His Son ruled it with justice and compassion, the months marched by her door, the winter passed and spring was toward. . . . Unlike Donovan Steele, she had no prescience of a portentous event. She met the spring gratefully, hopefully, but that was all. . . .

Chapter *Thirteen*

It had been a prosperous winter with Cluny at St. Fidèle—where he occupied the position of walking boss for a great pulp company, but found time to dabble in interests of his own which were calculated to make money for him more quickly than bossing woodsmen for wages. One of these ventures was that which had induced him to present Donovan Steele to Xavier Caron, for a man of Donovan's potential abilities had been required. However, when Donovan disappeared without answering yes or no to the proposition made him, Cluny was not greatly disturbed. He found another man, a Frenchman, and went ahead in a practical manner. The matter had progressed satisfactorily thus far and Cluny was satisfied with it.

Now, as the snows were melting in the woods and swelling brook and river—as new streams appeared to dash over cliffs where no streams ran in winter and summer, and as the day drew near when thousands of cords of pulp wood could be dumped into flood water to be carried down to estuaries giving upon the St. Laurence, Cluny sat in his office in an unpainted shack some miles from the village of St. Fidèle, and congratulated himself.

In another month barges would be tied to the great wharf a quarter of a mile off to the left and the clanking and bumping of the device which picked pulp bolts from the water, carried them along a high trestle, and dumped them through hoppers into the open hatches of the carriers would soon be apprising him that his season's work had been done and done well. In thirty days, if he cared to mount the promontory across the little bridge before his door, he could stand upon that high

spot and look over a bay jammed and piled with pulp to the height of a tall man, and, sweeping his eye inland and up the river, the same jumble of yellow would be seen to choke the stream from bank to bank as far as vision extended. . . . There, under his hand, would lie twenty-five thousand cords of pulp wood ready for the loading—ready for the long water journey to Ogdensburg or other destination, where it would be wrought, first into pulp, then into print paper whereon millions of citizens of the Republic below the line could read of society and finance and stocks and bonds and murders, and be swayed as to their opinion upon matters of vital importance to themselves. . . . In a sense Cluny was a purveyor of news. At any rate, his was one of the hands which gave to the newspaper world the paper upon which it spread its ink.

However, Cluny's thoughts were not upon this river or this estuary nor upon the pulp presently to arrive at this destination. He was thinking, rather, of his transaction with Xavier Caron and of the sure profits soon to accrue; profits which he was to divide with Xavier evenly and equitably—if both parties kept open eyes and each looked sharply to his own interests.

For Xavier and Cluny had been cutting pulp which was not their own, and had contracted for the delivery and sale of it.

The lay of the land was this—upon a royalty paid to the Dominion, Cluny's company had the grant of enormous timber limits stretching back into the mountains, stretching so far, in fact, that a corner of them abutted upon the signoury once owned by the Caron family, but now, if every man and woman in the world had his rights, by Nérée Caron alone. And this was the sum of the matter.

Xavier, living upon the fees allowed by the court to a guardian and executor, found them inadequate. It is true he was the potential owner of all the Caron wealth, but as yet

he had been unable to lay hands upon it, for, even though the present owner was a criminal, a fugitive, who must stand trial for the murder of her brother, that did not—until she was proven guilty and caused no longer to exist—deprive her of property rights. And, though she had vanished, the time was not yet when the courts might declare her dead.

So Xavier nibbled here and there as he might do astutely, but tried for a good, mouth-filling bite out of the wealth of La Chute. And this was the manner of his biting: he considered the lay of the property and then approached Cluny, already known to him. The result was a pulp operation which would not be mentioned in the commercial statistics of the Province. Cluny was to have charge of the actual working of the thing, which would be carried out with all possible secrecy, and masked, when inquisitive persons made inquiries, as a broadening of the cutting by Cluny's employers. The idea was to cut, if possible, some twenty thousand cords of pulp off the signoury of Nérée Caron, drive it to the river, and there sell it to export to the States, Xavier and Cluny to pocket the proceeds, which would be handsome. The thing was feasible, and, with a competent man in charge (which position Donovan Steele was to have had), the thing was done—done all but the drive and the delivery and the final receipt of the cash. It was of this that Cluny sat and ruminated with such apparent pleasure.

Presently a girl appeared in the door behind him and spoke, announcing that the Sunday dinner was on the table. Cluny arose ponderously and walked to his lonely place at the table, where he commenced upon his pea soup with gusto and a notable lack of silence as to the lips. Presently the plate was empty and the girl appeared again—a *habitant* girl with blackest hair and eyes, and cheeks which once had been round

and rosy, but now were gray and shadowed. Cluny did not look up from his plate, but he spoke.

"The *charetier* drives you to La Malbaie this afternoon," he said. That was all.

She sat down abruptly the platter of fried steak, and the grayness of her cheeks became whiteness.

"To La Malbaie—this afternoon!" she said in a hoarse whisper.

"Pack and be ready," said Cluny.

"You are sending me away?"

"I've hired a new cook," said Cluny.

A flash of the spirit of her race appeared in her eyes as she placed her hands upon the red-checkered tablecloth and leaned toward the big man. "Me—I am not to be sent away like—any cook," she said.

"Pack and be ready," Cluny repeated.

"But—but, m'sieu. . . . It is impossible. I—I cannot go. I dare not go."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You go," he said, and fell to eating his steak.

The girl did not speak again, but left the room, and when Gonzague drove up in midafternoon she appeared upon the porch, lugging a yellow satchel beyond her strength, lifted it with back-breaking effort to the back of the *char,* and wordlessly climbed to the seat beside the driver. Cluny did not appear. She did not search for him. There was no farewell. . . . He was sending her away because he was weary of her—and she was going—that was all. But one who looked into her eyes would not have cared to do so again, for despair in them too awful for mind to encompass or heart to endure. . . .

Cluny, as may have been said, was a bachelor—but he was not a monogamous bachelor, nor did he permit his state of

single blessedness to deprive him wholly of the solace of female companionship. Now he allowed himself completely to forget the girl who was just leaving on her long drive over the rough mountain roads to La Malbaie. He preferred thinking of the handsome sum he would presently bank. When he thought again of a woman it would not be of this one, but of her successor.

As Cluny went over, detail by detail, the transaction of himself and Xavier Caron, it was inevitable that his mind should flash for an instant to Donovan, who was to have been a part of it. His eyes closed to half their great size under his bulging brows and he looked off through the window speculatively. The name of this young man had come back to him during the winter, had come back on the tides of rumor, and Cluny wondered if, perhaps, it had not been for the best that Donovan had chosen to disappear. . . . Le Malcœur, that was the name he had earned for himself. It was a sinister name. . . . Cluny paused to recall the young man in detail and to appraise him. There was reason for this because Cluny was well aware how, during the last few months, his name had been coupled with Le Malcœur's.

Where Donovan had journeyed Cluny had been in the years before. This was all his country. He had seen it and mastered it, and, as Donovan was doing now, become a figure of dominance in it. It had been long since the position of Cluny had been questioned, long since any had asked the question if he or another were the best man. . . . And now that question was being put again and again. Cluny shrugged his shoulders.

The big man was no fool; he knew himself, and he knew men, and he knew something of the working of those unnamed laws which govern the movements and destinies of men—laws whose very existence are in dispute. He knew that men are

compelled against their desires. He knew there existed currents which threw human beings apart and drew them together without the volition of those involved. With human motives and human pride he was familiar, and he had seen it happen before that men, having earned a name for evil, and having been compared with each other by public opinion, were forced to meet and put their strength to the trial. It had happened so with him. Such men could not stay apart, no matter how reluctant they were to meet, how little there was to gain and how much to lose by the meeting.

On this Sunday afternoon Cluny shrugged his shoulders as has been said. It was the gesture of a fatalist. He felt certain that he and Donovan Steele—he and Le Malcœur—would meet again, and that songs would be made about the meeting. He did not crave the test, rather he would have avoided it if he could and would postpone it as long as craft would assist him to do—but the thing was inevitable in the end. . . . So he shrugged and gave his mind to other matters. . . . At this time Donovan and Leandre were in Tadousac, and their faces, whether they knew it or not, were turned toward the Murray River.

It was a week later when Cluny's affairs carried him to La Chute, and, having brought his errand to a satisfactory end before noon, he considered what he should do with the rest of the day. Then it was that he recalled the praise of the merchant of La Malbaie for the clever niece of Odilon Turcot of Ste. Agnès—and, being one who made up his mind and acted at the same time, he climbed into his conveyance, clucked to the horse, and drove to the northward.

He was not without a plausible errand, for he was searching for a cook to replace the one whom Gonzague had driven away a week before. What more natural than that he should apply

for help in his need to Odilon Turcot, the big man of Ste. Agnès?

Odilon greeted him with some effusiveness, for, though Cluny was not without his sinister threat, he was still a great man in the district, having favors to grant, jobs to give, and contracts to let—to say nothing of camp supplies to buy.

"Ah, M'sieu Cluny," he said, "it is long since we have seen you in Ste. Agnès."

"It has been a busy winter," Cluny said. "Has all gone well in the parish?"

"The saints have been kind. Of illness we have had our share, but few deaths. The women grow lonely for their men who labor in the woods."

"They will soon return," said Cluny, "and the farming will commence again."

"But will you not enter." He sniffed. "There come odors from the kitchen, and my Delima is a cook of the best."

"Fortunate man," said Cluny. "Pity me who have no wife and can hire only such women as others will not have to cook for them."

Odilon showed him with ceremony into the house and bustled to the kitchen, where he informed Delima importantly that Cluny, that great man, had come to consult with him on a matter of import and would stay to dinner. Whereupon there was bustling and chatter and anxiety as Delima and Madame and Nérée, who caught the infection, labored to make an excellent meal better.

"It must not be permitted," said Madame, "that he should report that the cookery at Odilon Turcot's is not of the best."

"Who is this great man?" Nérée asked.

"He is from St. Fidèle, where he is boss of all the woods," said Delima.

"And, little one, you should put your eye to the crack of

the door, for he is a man to see. In all the country is not one his equal for size."

"A man about whom there are tales," said Delima. "Ah, you know that man who is ever on Odilon's tongue—this Le Malcœur who came twice to our house?"

"Yes," said Nérée, expectantly.

"Before the coming of that one, this M'sieu Cluny was greatest of all in the district. Now there is doubt. Always the names are mentioned in a breath, and it is hoped they will meet."

"Why should they meet?"

"Because," said Madame wisely, "such is the nature of men. They be like bulls in a herd, and neither can have peace until one is gored."

"Is it best for me to appear?" Nérée asked. "Should I let this stranger see me? We have been secure so long that perhaps we grow careless."

"Nonsense!" said Delima. "He is of these parts. What harm can come?"

Nérée was not satisfied; nevertheless, when the dinner was ready, she sat at table with the rest and was presented to Cluny as Delima's niece.

The big man smiled. "Ah," said he, "the clever one! Who has not heard of Madame Turcot's niece who nurses the sick and is able to teach the school and who brought about the great transactions in homespun. Mam'selle I did not think to see you."

Nérée bowed and dropped her eyes, for the eyes of Cluny were on her face and she did not like the quality of their gaze.

"Aye, a smart girl," said Odilon, fatuously. "She can also cook with the best—and at the loom, m'sieu—at the loom she is nothing other than a marvel."

But these things counted little with Cluny in his appraisal.

It was the beauty of her, the fresh loveliness, the quality. Here was not such a girl as one ran across twice in a day's journey. Covertly he regarded her across the table from him, for it would not do to give offense, or to frighten the quarry. He studied her with the eye of a connoisseur, and wondered that the kin of Delima, rosy and buxom as she was, could have sired a daughter like Nérée. . . . Also, when she spoke, which she did sparingly, Cluny wondered the more, not so much at the correctness of her speech, which was vastly superior to his own. No, that might have been acquired by any in the convent. But the quality of her voice, that thing by which gentle blood is more readily discerned than by any other, fascinated him, intrigued him.

Throughout the meal Nérée felt Cluny's eyes; they embarrassed her, affronted her. She resented the man's manner, and was repelled by the immense masculinity of him. . . . He did not speak to her again directly, but argued politics and the ever-burning school question with Odilon. But Nérée felt that his thoughts were on her—as his eyes were upon her—stealthily.

At the end of the dinner she arose hastily with a word of excuse, and sought refuge in her room. She was curiously disturbed, almost frightened. . . . She did not return to the floor below until Cluny was gone.

Before he went he broached the subject of his coming.

"M'sieu Turcot," he said, "I have lost my cook. Perhaps you can name another to me. . . . Perhaps, with two women in the house, it may even be I can secure this clever niece—"

A look of horror, a look which startled Cluny—it was such a look almost as the angels might have exchanged had a blunderer suggested hiring one of the saints as a household drudge—passed from one to the other of the three.

"God forbid!" said Madame.

"M'sieu knows not what he asks," said Delima.

"It is unthinkable, m'sieu," said Odilon.

It was not so much the words as the manner which impressed Cluny, and as he drove back toward La Malbaie he asked himself a question not once but many times.

"Now why," he mused, "should the idea of my hiring a *habitant* girl for my cook upset the whole blamed fam'ly like that? Um. . . ."

Chapter *Fourteen*

Leandre Savard was happy, which is to say he was extraordinarily happy, for his normal state was one of happiness. His bright eyes gleamed, and in them was a light of glad anticipation. He hummed to himself and now and then broke into song, and the song which rose to his lips was one which should only be sung from a heart from which gladness welled.

" 'A la Claire Fontaine
M'en allant promenir,
J'ai trouve l'eau si belle
Que je m'y suis baigne,
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

Donovan eyed his companion with saturnine eye. "You are gay, *mon brave*."

"But yes. Who would not be gay. Have I not in my pocket more savings than I could have hoped to lay away in two winters, and do I not draw near to home. Also I shall marry my Odilie a month sooner than we hoped—for, see, I have the money. Ah, m'sieu, how happy my Odilie will be!"

"If she is not already happy with some other," said Donovan.

But Leandre only smiled and sang another verse; a verse about a nightingale making music upon the topmost branch:

" 'Sur le plus high branche
Le rossignol chantait,
Chante, rosignol, chante,
Toi que as le cœur gai.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.' "

And then he laughed aloud and smote himself upon the breast as a proud man may when he carries home a tale of true adventure to a waiting heart. "But my Odilie, she will be proud. It is so. *Nom de dieu,* m'sieu—how she will regard me with big eyes, that I have journeyed so far and seen so much of the world. The neighbors will come in—I can see them trooping toward the door—and they will sit in a circle around Odilie and me while I astound them with tales of the things I have seen. And all the time, m'sieu, as I sit, Odilie's little hand will rest in mine. . . . *Par example!* And she will look about the company as if she would say, 'Regard him, everybody, this Leandre Savard. This is the manner of man I have won for my husband.'" He wagged his head boyishly and fairly wriggled with impatience to arrive at this hour of his greatness.

"But," said Donovan, "if this does not happen, eh? The time has been long, Leandre, and he who trusts a woman embarks in a leaking canoe. . . . You do not know women, Leandre—or men."

"I know my Odilie," Leandre said, stanchly, after which he regarded Donovan gravely and with wrinkled brow. Once or twice he opened his mouth to speak, but could not find courage to utter the thought which lay upon his mind. But as Donovan sat gazing moodily across the water Leandre's courage mounted.

"M'sieu," he said, "we have journeyed far together."

"It is true."

"And seen many things."

"Many."

"And performed great feats—thou and I."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders.

"So that," said Leandre, "it may be I can speak to m'sieu without offense."

Donovan lifted his eyes curiously to his companion's face.

"I will not be offended," he said.

"Then, m'sieu, is it not better to be the nightingale, singing with the gay heart upon the high branch, than it is to be the mole, blind, seeing nothing of the fine world and living ever in a burrow filled with darkness?"

"Better for the nightingale, perhaps, but what would a mole do with a song on a high branch?"

"*C'est drôle,*" said Leandre, with a great laugh. "Imagine if you can a mole climbing a tree to sing. That is a thing the neighbors would travel far to see, eh? . . . But which, m'sieu, think you, leads the life more pleasing to God?"

"This God you make so much noise about—He created both mole and nightingale, did he not? And to each gave its peculiar nature?"

"But yes. Nevertheless, He may take greater pleasure in one than in the other, and it would be the nightingale He loves, m'sieu—because He loves happiness—and that is why He has fashioned the high heaven, where nothing but happiness may live. Eh? I tell you, m'sieu, He loves the nightingale because the nightingale is happy, but more, m'sieu, because the little bird makes others to be happy also. Is it not so? Who may listen to its song and not be gay."

"But where does this lead, Leandre? How has it to do with me?"

Leandre hesitated. "M'sieu will not be angry?"

Donovan shook his head.

"It is because, m'sieu, you are the mole and not the nightingale. It is your misfortune—like some great illness—to be blind to the things which make the nightingale sing, and you live in a dark burrow. Aye, it is so. . . . I have watched you, m'sieu, with the eyes of a friend, and I have seen. You live in a darkness, and you have no eyes with which to see

how good is the world and how men and women make happiness for one another."

"I have seen what men and women make for one another, Leandre, and it is not happiness."

"Because of the burrow and the blindness," said Leandre, earnestly. "It is in my mind that it is an illness. As if the lungs were fevered, or, it may be, as if the leg was bent. Ah, a lameness, that is the thing. M'sieu should make a good pilgrimage to Ste. Anne, that she might grant him a favor and make him well as other men are."

"Ste. Anne! Leandre, in seriousness, do you believe this nonsense about the shrine—that the lame are made to walk, and the sick to be well, and the blind to see?"

"I do not believe, m'sieu, because, it appears, the word believe touches something which may or may not be known to be so. No, m'sieu, I do not believe, I know."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders. Presently he spoke again, but more to himself than to Leandre Savard. "No, I am not ill," he said, "nor blind. It is that I see too clearly and am not deceived. It is a trick of this God of yours to let men and women deceive themselves in order that they may deceive one another. . . . No, Leandre, I have seen and I have experienced. This, as you say of your Ste. Anne, is not a matter of belief; it is a matter of knowledge."

Leandre considered and then he presented his argument. "Look you," he said. "If you had never seen a deer, m'sieu, and should go into the woods and a deer with white hair should run past the spot where you stood—an Albino deer such as are sometimes to be found—and you never in your life were to see another deer, then you would know that deer are white, would you not? *Vraiment.* You would know because you saw. . . . But you would know a thing that was not true, because it is very few deer that have the white coats—is it not?"

"You are eloquent, Leandre—but a sophist."

"I do not know what a sophist is, m'sieu, but if it be a sophist to know that hearts are good and that friends are good and that my Odilie is true—then I am pleased to be one of them."

"Wait," said Donovan, "and when you have had experience, we shall see. . . . That," he said, "is life—you think it very fine *mon brave,* until it sinks its teeth into you."

It was not yet May when they arrived again in La Malbaie. Leandre came with unmixed emotions, Donovan Steele such emotions as a man may have when, against his will, he puts himself to the test, tries his untried armor, and couches a lance whose shaft is of unknown wood. La Malbaie had become the center of his universe—home, if any spot could be called his home—at any rate, it was the inevitable spot, the fulcrum of his lever. Months ago he had set out to disentangle his life line from all other life lines, but in La Malbaie and its territory it had, by some stealthy, inexorable progress, become snarled again. What pleasure he took in his arrival was from his determination to unsnarl it and to be free forever. He was confident. He had seasoned himself, was strong in his selfishness, in his knowledge of the malign nature of mankind, and in his scorn for the living.

It was his determination to throw himself in the way of Nérée Caron—to challenge her, as it were, to do her worst upon him. . . . He would not avoid Cluny—nor would he hide from Xavier Caron. These three had fastened themselves upon him in inexplicable fashion, and he meant to cut them off and cast them away. . . .

As for Leandre, no sooner had his feet trodden the streets of La Malbaie than he bade good-by to Donovan. It was before the steps of the commercial hotel and Leandre was not happy

in the parting. He was apologetic, explanatory. Donovan was silent, repellent, unemotional.

"M'sieu," said Leandre, "I must go now—to Odilie. I cannot delay. See—I give you my hand in farewell. M'sieu has let me give him my friendship." It will be noticed he did not say that m'sieu had given him his friendship. "I have a regard for m'sieu, but now is the end of our travels. . . . If m'sieu will but come with me he will find warm welcome. Odilie will welcome you as my friend, and you shall be the honored guest at the wedding. . . . Ah, such a wedding as it shall be, with all the neighbors, and Jean Dufour with his fiddle. . . . But m'sieu will not come."

"No, I will not come," said Donovan.

"Then good-by, m'sieu." Leandre's eyes were not of the driest. "You shall not be forgotten, and Odilie and I will daily request of the saints that they ask of *le bon Dieu* to send you happiness—aye, m'sieu, and eyes to see, and a life to live that is not a mole in his burrow. . . . Good-by, m'sieu."

Donovan did not speak; it seemed there was nothing to say. There was nothing he wanted to say, yet, to his consternation, he was aware that this parting meant something to him. It was a parting with the one human being whose society he tolerated and who had shared some degree of intimacy with him. When Leandre departed he would be alone. . . . Alone! Could it be that the coming loneliness cast its shadow upon him and oppressed him? The thought angered him so that his manner toward Leandre was other than he had intended, more bleak, less casual. That was the word. He had intended to part with the man casually, as if he had just met him in the street. But he could not be casual. For close upon a year Leandre had been his dog, had watched him with jealous, loving eye to perform those little services which only devoted friendship knows how to perform. Leandre had been nothing

to him, but he had been much to Leandre. He sought to conceal from himself that Leandre's going would leave a void, a hollow spot in his life of which he could not render himself unconscious. So he barely touched Leandre's hand and shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the hotel steps. Not even a word of good-by!

"But, m'sieu—" Leandre expostulated, in his distress.

"Go to your Odilie," Donovan said, harshly.

"But I will see m'sieu again? He will visit in my home—"

"No," said Donovan.

"It—it may be m'sieu and I shall one day go upon our travels again."

"Never."

Donovan turned his back brusquely and mounted the steps. Leandre stood looking after him, not with offended eyes, not angered, but sorrowful; and such was his faithful friendship that his sorrow was not for himself, that the man he loved held him so lightly, but for Donovan, that he could hold so lightly the friendship of a friend. He shook his head and walked up the street, turning at the first corner to take the road leading to the little farm of Odilie Boucher's father. He did not drive; he walked, because by walking he saved a sum, and Odilie and he would require every dollar of his savings. . . .

Donovan sat alone in his little room at the top of the house, and, as a man must do when one thing is behind him, wondered what he should next undertake. What had gone before, he felt, was but preparatory, a molding and disciplining of himself. Now his life was to begin. He was upon a new threshold. The old life, swept away a year before, was as if it had never been; the past months were a sort of between state, neither the new life nor the old; now would begin the actual living.

He did not look forward with anticipation. Life held out no promises. His plan, if coherent plan he had, was to live

with the least annoyance possible, to go his way coldly, inexorably, doing what must be done to maintain life and avoiding what would make that life more troublesome to him, harder to live. The best he hoped for was to be left alone, not to be disturbed or annoyed, not to know grief or agony. Just to live—that was it—to live for himself and get the thing over with painlessly.

He went to bed. When he awoke to-morrow it would be to face what he must face, to take up the monotony of life, to answer the challenge made to his indifference by the beauty and the plight of Nérée Caron, by the dominant personality and the potentialities of Cluny, and by the web-weaving of that handsome, courteous, aristocratic shell which incased and concealed the malignity of Nérée's uncle Xavier.

In the morning he was astir early, for rising at dawn had become a matter of habit, essential to the life he had lived. He descended and stepped out upon the porch of the hotel, and there, huddled against a post, head sunk upon his knees, turkey at his feet, a picture of utter woe, sat Leandre Savard!

He stood in the door, irresolute, did Donovan Steele, and irresolution was not a quality he had cultivated. He saw and, seeing, he comprehended. . . . Life had dealt its blow to Leandre; had smitten Leandre's great faith, had blighted his simple, abounding happiness. . . . What now of the nightingale upon its most high branch, and what of the mole! Donovan's mouth writhed in a thing that was not a smile and was too bitter to be a sneer.

"Eh, *mon brave!*" he said, making his voice casual.

Leandre raised his face and turned. The youth was gone from it, and that gayety without which it was the face of another man. Leandre's face not gay, was no longer Leandre's face. His eyes were black with affliction, and he had been weeping. It was so unlike Leandre to weep!

"M'sieu," he said in a dead voice, "I have come back to you."

What Donovan thought to say, willed to say was, "Ah, and so you have discovered what a woman's fidelity is," but his will had not the strength. Instead he remained silent.

"My Odilie," said Leandre, "she—m'sieu—she sent me away."

"I warned you," said Donovan, harshly.

"You warned me," Leandre said, "but it was a thing impossible—a thing which could not be."

"Yet it is," said Donovan.

"It is," responded Leandre.

Again Donovan was silent.

"I reached her door before the bedtime," Leandre said, "and, m'sieu, you can imagine it, how high was my heart and with what eagerness I opened the gate. . . . And from the walk I called, for I could not wait to reach the door. I called loudly and gayly the name of Odilie and shouted that I was come. . . . And there was silence, m'sieu, a strange silence which made me suddenly to be frightened."

"Yes," said Donovan, grimly.

"And then, m'sieu, I was at the door, which stood open, and I called again, but no voice answered, and I called yet again. Then, m'sieu, one came slowly toward me from the kitchen—one I did not recognize for the shadows and because she was so thin, m'sieu, so pitifully thin, and of the face so white. As she came I saw that she was telling her beads; and that, I learn from others, is how she occupies the hours of the day and far into the night. She prays, I am told, for death."

"Go on," said Donovan.

"She came to me at the door and spoke my name once—only once—and when, in my so great eagerness, I would have taken her into my arms, she moved aside and in a voice like the voice of the dead she said to me that I must not touch her.

. . . So I stood like one whose brains are turned to milk, m'sieu, and she, not weeping, but in a voice from the grave, spoke to me again.

" 'You must go away,' she said.

" 'But no,' said I, 'It is I, Leandre Savard, and I am come to marry you as soon as may be.'

" 'I know you, Leandre,' she said, 'but you are not to marry me or to touch me—or to think of me—for, Leandre, I have betrayed your love and there is nothing left for me but to die.'

"So I, standing there bewildered, argued with her and pleaded with her and held out my arms to her, but she would not let me come near, and so standing, she told me what had happened, m'sieu . . . and sent me away. She would have none of me, nor would she let me enter her house. . . . And her story was this, m'sieu, that, thinking to add to our savings, and being such a cook as one seldom meets, she entered the service of a man, and that man was evil. But she blamed herself equally with him, m'sieu, and it was pitiful to hear. . . . And this man, by force and by wiles of great wickedness, made her as she was, and then, tiring of her and her tears, for she was not happy with him, nor did she love him at all, he sent her away. . . . That is the story, m'sieu. . . . And she sent me away. I am here, and—m'sieu will not also send me away?"

"Who," asked Donovan, "was this man?"

"His name," said Leandre, "is Cluny."

"Cluny!"

"So she said, m'sieu."

"And what will you do—with respect to this man Cluny? Will you kill him?"

"No, m'sieu, I do not kill. It is a great wickedness to kill even the wicked."

"Then what?"

"I do not know, m'sieu, since she sent me away and would have nothing to do with me."

"Since she sent you away!"

"That is it," said Leandre, with surprise. "Do you think I would have come if she had not sent me? . . . Do you think I, Leandre Savard, who loves her as he loves his own soul, would desert her in her grief? What can m'sieu think of me? Ah, very poorly, it is to be seen."

"I do not understand," said Donovan in a queer, strained voice. "You would have—remained with her—with this woman who betrayed you—if she had permitted?"

"Yes, m'sieu," Leandre said, simply. "I would have remained and, as was my duty, I would have sought in all ways to make her smile again and forget this so-terrible thing. I would have wrapped her in my love, m'sieu, as if she had been a babe. . . . That is what I would have done."

"You would have married her?"

"I would have made her my wife. . . . Oh yes, m'sieu. Mine is not a little love. It is not a love that comes and goes with the wind. But no. . . . And am I to judge, m'sieu? For that is the task of the good God. Do we not all sin? But for the intercession of the saints and the compassion of the sweet Jesus, would we not all be dealt with harshly in the strict justice of God? It was a terrible thing, m'sieu, and it has broken her heart. The great sin was the man Cluny's—or so it seems to me—and her sin, if there was a sin—well, m'sieu, it is not for me to speak."

Donovan came a step closer and peered into Leandre's face as if he had never seen him before. "Go on," he said, harshly.

"She loves me," said Leandre, "but because it would be a stain upon my honor she sends me away—that is how I read it." Then, of a sudden, he leaped to his feet. "M'sieu," he said, "I am no man; I am a coward. Behold, at the first blow

I fall." His eyes lighted and for a moment he was almost his old self again. "Regard me, I do not come back to you, m'sieu. But no, I go back to her, for that is my place and her place is here." He laid his finger upon his heart. "I go, and the saints will show me how I shall prove to her that I love her. . . . Do you not think, m'sieu, if she can be sure that I love her in spite of what has been, that she will let me stay?" His eyes sought Donovan's in question.

"I—do—not—know." The words seemed to be wrung from his throat.

"It shall be. She shall be happy and I shall be happy. That is the way." He got to his feet and seized his turkey and moved toward the street.

"Where are you going?" Donovan demanded, harshly.

"To Odilie—back to Odilie," said Leandre, simply, and he walked away with shoulders erect and great determination in his stride.

Donovan started after him as one who has seen an apparition; stood staring while one might have counted a hundred. Then he turned and walked across the bridge and back toward the country, and his face was the face of a man who had watched water run up a hillside, or who has discovered two solids occupying the same space.

Chapter Fifteen

Cluny and Donovan met on the porch of the hotel, and the meeting was watched by curious, hopeful eyes. The big man was coming up the steps as Donovan stepped out of the door, and, with a dozen feet between them, both paused involuntarily. For an instant they looked into each other's eyes with unwavering glances; then came curiosity, and for another instant each man appraised the other before a word of greeting passed. Undoubtedly the same thought was in the mind of each—that inevitably they would be drawn toward each other, attracted irresistibly, until some clash of interests, some event, some impact of desires or hatreds, should, like a spark, touch the magazines of their blood lust and they would be at it. One other thought was with Donovan—that here was the man who had destroyed Leandre Savard's happiness.

Vehemently he put this thought aside. What was it to him? Leandre Savard might look to his own affairs and take what came to him. He, Donovan Steele, was not to be influenced by another's wrongs; would not let another's reason for hatred against Cluny stir his emotions. . . . He shrugged his shoulders.

"Good evening," he said, coldly.

"So you're back," said Cluny, "at last."

"At last," said Donovan.

"Been hearin' consid'able about you."

Donovan lifted his shoulders again, and Cluny smiled. He had ability in that line. His great, plain face was capable of lighting as he smiled, of becoming genial, comradely. That smile was an important part of his stock in trade and held for

him many friends who might have believed whispered evil and turned away if he had been a thin and dour man.

"Stayin' here?"

"For a while," said Donovan.

"Got a job?"

"When I want a job there will be one."

"I hear you've got a winnin' way of findin' work," said Cluny, with a chuckle. "But out at St. Fidèle we don't run things that way."

This was more or less of a challenge, but Donovan disregarded it; rather he uttered one of his own, and that without intending to do so.

"I hear," he said, "you are without a cook."

Cluny's face became intent, watchful. "Int'rested in cooks?" he asked.

"Only slightly," said Donovan.

"Look here," said Cluny, "I'm an older man than you, and there's a lot of the world I've seen. I'm reachin' the conclusion that, in spite of folks' loose gamble, there's more money in it for you and me to pull together in one boat—"

Donovan interrupted. "There's room for only one in my boat," he said, and then walked outward, toward Cluny, past him, so that their shoulders touched, and went his way up the street. Cluny did not move, and spectators drew deep breaths again, for the moment had been weighted with possibilities. Cluny walked silently up to his room, where he shaved and put on a shirt more suitable to the purposes of society, and waited. Presently the train from Quebec whistled for the station and Cluny composed himself to receive a visitor who presently rapped on the door.

"Come in," said Cluny, and Xavier Caron entered.

"A miserable journey," he said, with distaste. "Cattle cars full of lunching women and squalling babies."

"There won't be no parlor cars on for a month or more," said Cluny. "Not till the tourists start comin'."

"Is the food here endurable?"

"About the same quality as the beds," said Cluny, with a twinkle, "and nigh as sim'lar. If you can make out with ham and eggs and beefsteak and pea soup, you won't starve."

Xavier's fine aristocrat nose elevated itself. "I had to come," he said, "and I imagine the profit will pay for the discomfort. Are you sure you can deliver twenty thousand cords?"

"Piled in the woods and ready for the river," said Cluny.

"Nothing untoward has occurred?"

"If you mean has anybody been nosin' around—no. And the' ain't any talk, so far's I can learn." Then he began to chuckle. "Seems kind of humorous," he said, "a man takin' all the trouble you do to rob himself."

"That," said Xavier, "is a word it is unnecessary to use. It is distasteful."

"Here you be," said Cluny, "cuttin' off timber that's your own—eventually—and sneakin' it down to the river and sellin' it and givin' me half the profits. Kind of a situation to tickle a man."

"I see no humor in it."

"Calc'late I wouldn't, neither, if I was you," said Cluny. "Hain't there any prospect of gettin' your affairs straightened out to suit you?"

"Such things take time, my friend."

"No word of the girl. Nothin' turn up about her?"

"The police," said Xavier, speaking carefully, "have found no trace of her—living or dead."

"Dead would please you most, I calc'late. Um. . . . Don't seem right a girl should make a man so much trouble. Ever have an idee what became of her?"

"None. From the moment she left that theater nobody saw her. She vanished as completely, my friend, as if she had dissolved into air."

"And there's the rub," said Cluny.

"There," agreed Xavier, "is the rub."

"Kind of hard for me to get a picture in my mind of a young girl that could up and poison a little boy," said Cluny. "Don't seem natural, as you might say. . . . And she went about it in sich a ridic'lous fashion. No rhyme nor reason to it. Sure to get caught. . . . Nothin' wrong with her head, was there?"

"She was always considered an unusually brilliant girl," said Xavier.

"Pretty?"

"A beauty," said Xavier.

"Um. . . . Makes it seem all the more ag'in' nature. Say, you don't happen to have a picture of her by you, do you? I'd kind of like to see what a girl looks like that's capable of murder."

Xavier turned to his bag. "It happens," he said, "that I have . . . among some papers returned to me by the lawyers for the estate." He fumbled in his fine leather case. "Here it is—not large, but an excellent likeness." He handed the photograph to Cluny, who walked to the window and looked at it.

The big man's face did not change; he did not lift his eyes or move his hands on start. Rather he demanded complete immobility of himself. For a full minute he studied the picture before he handed it back to Xavier. "She hain't got the look of it," was all he said.

"There can, unfortunately, be no doubt of her guilt," said Caron.

"So you've mentioned before," Cluny said, dryly, and then,

with strange alacrity, he changed the subject to pulp and the price of pulp and the date of delivery. Business held them long after they returned to Cluny's room after supper, and it was after ten o'clock when Xavier said good night in his courtly way and retired.

When he was gone Cluny stared at the door for a long minute; then he spoke to himself.

"'Tain't possible," he said.

But, for all the impossibility, there was a strange, a startling resemblance. The hair was not done in the same manner; there was no gown from an exclusive costumier, there was none of the evidence of wealth and leisure and aristocracy—but the features were the same. . . . Cluny tried to visualize the girl of the photograph in the dress and surroundings of a daughter of *habitants*. . . . No, it was the sort of thing which could not happen! It was a resemblance, surely, but close resemblances were possible. He wagged his head and laughed at himself. It was absurd to suppose, because of a certain resemblance, that the niece of Xavier Caron and the niece of Delima Turcot were one and the same

But, on the other hand, if the impossible were the truth—in that event Cluny had happened upon one of those facts out of which an astute man might realize much in one way or another. A fact like that is capital. It is an asset readily turned into money.

Cluny was a logical man. To suppose that Nérée Caron and the Turcot girl were one would, necessarily, presuppose some connection between the Turcot family and the Caron's. It would not come by chance that Nérée Caron would seek refuge with that family, nor that they would present her as their niece, support her under their frugal roof, and sponsor her identity. No, that would not do. Cluny was one who looked for motives, and, so far as he was aware, the Turcots

had no motive for harboring a fugitive from justice. It would have to be strong motive, for their act was criminal and would, conceivably, bring disastrous consequences to them. He wondered if the girl had vanished with a large sum of money and so had been able to purchase fidelity; but this theory he discarded at once. Money would not purchase what the Turcots gave. Either the girl was actually what she was said to be, or there was some great, compelling reason why Odilon Turcot, knowing who she was and what she had done, would conduct himself as *he* had done.

Cluny went to bed. His last waking determination was to keep a still tongue and a casual, not interested, demeanor, and to discover if any line led from the house in Ste. Agnès to the mansion in Montreal.

Next day he allowed the business at St. Fidèle to attend to itself while he made discreet inquiries; but nobody he could find in La Malbaie knew anything of the affairs of the Turcots. He nosed about until noon, and then, deeming the matter of sufficient importance, he drove out to La Chute, halfway to Ste. Agnès, and there, loading bales of pulp upon flat cars, he found a man who was second cousin to Odilon Turcot. Him he engaged in talk.

As may have been noted, Cluny's French was rather more courteous than his English.

"It is work for a strong man," he said as he stood beside the car.

"Of a truth," the laborer said, pausing, and glad of an interruption.

Cluny pretended to scrutinize the man, and then said, as though surprised, "Are you not named Turcot?"

"It is my name," said the man, gratified at the recognition of so important a person as Cluny.

"Related to Odilon Turcot of Ste. Agnès?" Cluny asked.

"A cousin."

"Ah, now there is a clever fellow. A merchant, eh? The dollars do not slip away from him, I warrant?"

"The man of his village," Cousin Turcot said, proudly.

"I have dined with him and his wife. An excellent cook that? Did he marry her from this parish?"

"Not so. From St. Famille on the island. But he did well. She is a good wife."

"Ah," said Cluny, and waited.

"But why should she not be a clever housekeeper, eh? *Par exemple!* She knows the ways of the world and of the rich, does my cousin Odilon's wife. She has been to Montreal!" He stated this as if challenging disbelief. "Aye, for many years she was in that city, and she knows many things. In a great house, she was, and I have listened many evenings to tales of its bigness and the furniture that was in it and the glittering silver. A veritable palace, m'sieu, if you will credit me!"

"And your cousin's wife, was she, perhaps, the cook?"

"Not so, m'sieu. Hers was the care of the children. It is the truth. For that purpose she was hired and paid wages, which she saved and brought to my cousin Odilon. A great sum. Two children she cared for and from their birth. First a girl, then a boy. . . . But m'sieu has heard the dreadful thing which befell them?"

"I have not heard," said Cluny.

"The girl—it was in the newspapers, m'sieu, and we thought the heart of Delima would break—was of a frightful wickedness. It is the truth. A murderess, m'sieu. With poison she killed her brother, and has never been seen by any man since. *Vraiment!* Vanished, m'sieu. . . ."

"So. . . . And Madame Turcot was the nurse, you say.

C'est terrible! . . . But, my friend, I must return to town. If ever you need employment, come to me at St. Fidèle. Do not forget."

Cluny strode away from that place to his waiting horse, and presently the springs sagged and groaned under the great weight of his body. His eyes were half closed and brooding. . . . Delima Turcot was the old nurse of Nérée Caron! Delima Turcot had been with the girl since her birth. . . . There, indeed, was a thread running from the house in Ste. Agnès to the mansion in Montreal. . . . Cluny drove slowly while he realized it, while he rolled the knowledge under his tongue and enjoyed greatly the taste of it. . . . The impossible had become possible. There was a motive, and a sufficient motive. Delima Turcot had such reason as was ample for any woman to shelter a fugitive. Yes, the motive was there and the resemblance was there, but yet it remained to establish the fact. Cluny would not permit himself to rest within such easy distance of the truth and not seize the truth. Nor would anything less than certainty suffice for him. . . . He drove onward to Ste. Agnès.

Nérée was alone in the house when he arrived, and answered his rap at the door. One might have judged, from her expression, that she saw no welcome caller.

"*Bon jour,* mam'selle," said Cluny, with his most convincing smile.

"Good day, m'sieu. My uncle is not in the house, but I will run and fetch him."

"And your aunt?"

"She also is at a neighbor's."

Cluny stepped through the door and moved toward a chair. "Doubtless," he said, "they will return shortly. In the meantime, shall we not talk?"

"If m'sieu desires," said Nérée, frightened, but seeing no way in which to extricate herself from the annoying situation. "But it will be no trouble to fetch my uncle."

"Let him enjoy himself," said Cluny, and he chuckled. "Is it that M'sieu Turcot informed you I was seeking for a cook?"

"No, m'sieu."

"Ah, that is strange. . . . I have heard much praise of you, mam'selle, not for your cleverness and the kindness of your heart alone, but also for the excellence of your cooking."

"M'sieu is kind." Nérée stood very straight, her eyes not leaving the face of this huge man of indeterminate age who was, through some message from his soul to her soul, so repulsive to her. Why had he come there? Why had he insisted upon her remaining when his errand, if legitimate errand he had, could be only with Odilon Turcot? She did more than distrust him; intuitively she knew his purpose was malign.

"I have thought often of you, mam'selle," she heard him say, "since—you left the table and did not return," he said with a twinkle of malice in his eye.

"If," said Nérée, "you noted that circumstance, why do you hold me here in conversation now?"

"Because, mam'selle, I am not a man easily discouraged. Do I look to be one to think twice of a girl's humors?"

"You look, m'sieu, to be one who thinks twice about his meals."

Cluny laughed deep in his chest and regarded her with pleasurable speculation.

"Your French," he said, "is not of the farms."

"Like my courtesy," said Nérée, "it is better than that of many I meet."

"Is it courteous to call me fat and tell me my manners need improvement?"

"If m'sieu had not kept me here he would have heard more pleasant words from my uncle."

"But not spoken by such pretty lips."

"My lips," said Nérée coldly, "are no affair of m'sieu's."

"Would you have me think them homely?" Cluny said, with a great laugh.

"I would have you think of them—or me—not at all."

Cluny watched her as a lion might watch some succulent bird within reach of its paw. She delighted him, she excited him. What a woman! What beauty, spirit, carriage! He was not accustomed to her like, but, seeing them from a distance, had often coveted them. Decidedly, he thought, her poise and bearing were not those of a simple *habitant* girl. What girl of the people could stand there holding her own with him, and better, and yet losing no whit of the dignity which made her what she was. Wit a *habitant* girl might have, and courage and beauty—but not manner! He was becoming convinced.

"You have never been in service, like your aunt," he said, taking his pleasure in playing with her catwise.

"No," she said, but the color of her eyes deepened.

"A nurse, was she not?" he asked.

"Yes," said Nérée.

He changed his tack. "I pay excellent wages to my cook," he said.

"Do I understand m'sieu offers me the position?" Nérée said, and it was not Delima Turcot's niece who spoke, but the girl who had stood as reigning belle of the society of a great city. She spoke as she would have spoken in her own drawing-room, forgetting she was not there; spoke ironically, flicking

him with the question, as if he as well as she knew its utter absurdity.

"That," said Cluny, "was what I had in mind."

Nérée laughed then, deliciously, captivatingly. "That would be a thing," she said, and laughed again. It was so absurd as, for the moment, to disarm her. The idea of a Caron hiring herself out to cook in a lumber camp!

"Why," asked Cluny, with intent to flick her again, "is it so unthinkable? If your aunt could be a nurse, why not you a cook? Are you better than other *habitant* girls. What sets you above them?"

"Oh," said Nérée, "I cook. Daily I cook in Aunt Delima's kitchen. It was the idea of cooking for *you* which was absurd."

"And why?" demanded Cluny, stung as she had hoped to sting.

"Because," said Nérée, with impishness twinkling in her eyes, "I thought m'sieu would prefer hay to cookery."

Anger surged in Cluny, and when the man was angered he was not to be taken lightly. There were depths to him and capabilities to him—and, in anger, he did not always distinguish clearly between the wise and the unwise, the advisable and the inadvisable. When anger seized him wholly, he was terrible. . . . He lurched forward in his chair and glared at her, and she laughed again.

"Because," she said, "m'sieu seems more accustomed to a stall than a dining room."

He mastered himself and contrived a smile, but there was little mirth in it. No man, especially a man of parts, a man of place and fame in his country, a man more often truckled to than opposed, enjoys being put in his place.

"You have a sharp tongue," was the best he could manage on the instant.

"It might have been well out of range some time ago," she said.

"So," he said, "you will not come to cook for me?"

"As soon," she said, "I would sweep the streets of Montreal." It was a slip which Cluny was quick to take profit of.

"What do you know of Montreal?" he asked, and when he saw her brows descend, he added, "Why not say as soon sweep the corridors of a prison?"

"It is a good amendment," she said, with composure.

"In what family?" he asked. "Was your aunt nurse?"

Now, instinctively, Nérée perceived a danger, and her stalwart little heart armed itself and called upon her clever brain for aid.

"A family in Montreal," she said, indifferently.

"Ah, in Montreal. Was the child she nursed a boy or girl?"

"She speaks of two."

"And this family—did she never mention its name?"

"Oh, many times," said Nérée, terror reaching a cold hand toward her heart. If he should demand the name, could she compel herself to pronounce it? . . . He asked the name.

"Caron, they were called," she said, and was astonished to hear how level, how without emotion her voice sounded.

"Caron. . . . Not—it is not possible—this cannot be that family of the murder! *C'est impossible!* . . . The girl who killed her brother."

"Who," said Nérée, "is accused of killing her brother."

"Is it not the same?"

"Nérée was certain this man must hear the beating of her heart. "It seems to me," she said, "not to be the same."

"Then you believe her innocent?"

Then Nérée forgot herself, forgot everything in that awful recollection, the awful sight, the frightful occurrence of that night a year before . . . in the unbearableness of the accusa-

tion, that she should be accused by any of giving poison to the child, her brother. "I know—I *know*—she is innocent," she said.

"Ah," said Cluny.

"I will call my uncle," Nérée said, with sudden weakness. She felt she must leave the room, seek the air. Her knees trembled.

Cluny chuckled. "You will be interested to hear that Xavier Caron is in La Malbaie," he said.

"Why should that interest me?" she said, struggling for composure, continuing to face him bravely.

"Because," he said, "it would be droll, eh, if I were to put him in my carriage and drive with him to Ste. Agnès. Then," he said, "there might be sweeping of prisons in earnest."

It was out. He had not intended to betray his knowledge to her until a moment when he had planned how best to profit by it. But it was out. . . . He watched her face. In that moment he admired her in a finer, manlier way than had been his previous admiration. No man could watch her as the blow fell and not admire her. Her face became white, it is true, and her eyes grew big and dark, but she did not flinch. She did not totter or seek support, but took the disclosure standing; and when she had digested the fact of his knowledge briefly, she drew a deep breath as though of relief.

It had happened; the thing under fear of which she had walked in the daylight and lain awake in the darkness had befallen. She was recognized, the end of her flight had come. . . .

"I," she said, and her voice was very sweet and calm and steadfast, "—I am Nérée Caron."

He nodded, unable to speak for watching her in this great moment.

"My uncle sent you?" she asked.

"No." For some reason, some kindness in him, unsuspected, some survival of excellence out of a forgotten past, urged him to reassure her. "He does not know you are here. Nobody knows but me."

Nobody knew but this man, who played with her as a cat plays with a mouse. . . . That was not true. She remembered—another man knew and had known for hard upon a year; another knew who had saved her, against his own will, from her uncle Xavier. She found time in her emergency to wonder where he was, this Le Malcœur. She found time to wish that he were here. And that was a strange thing. If he were here, if Donovan Steele were in this room, would he not again find means to save her?

She spoke. "What will you do with your knowledge?" she asked, steadily.

"Use it in good time," said Cluny, his eyes upon her desirously. "That requires thought. . . . You, also, may consider it. You may even come to be my cook. Who knows?" He laughed and got to his feet. "Frankly," he said, "and I tell you this so you may be in a more reasonable humor when I come again—soon—I am asking myself if there will be more profit to me in telling your uncle Xavier, or in keeping the knowledge to myself." He strode close to her and seized her by the shoulders, while his great blazing eyes bored into hers as if he would read her soul.

"Did you kill your brother?" he asked.

"Before God, I did not," she said.

If she could have known what was to come of that answer, carrying convictions as it did, she might have been tempted to have answered that she did kill her brother. But she answered, and Cluny believed. He released his hold upon her.

"I knew it," he said to himself. "With that face, you couldn't have done it." It will be perceived this last sentence was spoken in English. He moved toward the door, where he turned. "Don't run away," he said, "for I shall catch you. I shall come again—very soon . . . and then we shall see."

Chapter *Sixteen*

The human will is an unaccountable device. Once upon a time there was a man who smoked too many cigars, and he said to himself, "I will see if I can break the habit," so he determined he would smoke no more for a week, to test the matter. The seven days passed and the eighth dawned, so he laid out a box of cigars and said, "I will smoke at noon." But when noon came he said, "I will put off smoking until six o'clock." You see, he had set the machinery of his will in operation and it acted eccentrically. He wanted very much to smoke; his mouth watered for tobacco; he had abstained for the period set by his promise to himself, but still he could not smoke. It was very strange. Every time he lifted a cigar he laid it down again and postponed tasting it for a few hours more. It was droll, but he could not bring himself to do the thing he wanted to do. . . . Donovan Steele was undergoing a similar experience.

For nearly a year he had traveled in parts far distant from Ste. Agnès; now he had returned, and one of his major purposes was to revisit that parish.

"I will go Sunday," he said to himself, but on the Sabbath morning he did not start. "I will go this afternoon," he promised himself, but noon came and, though Ste. Agnès drew him, he could not start. "I will go this evening," he said, and waited with very little pleasure and a growing irritation. But in the evening something within him, something hidden but potent, declined to permit his starting, and he went to bed for the second time in La Malbaie.

Who is there able to account for such a vagary? All one may say is that it is human, and to be human is to be a strange,

wonderful compound of emotions and passions and desires and inhibitions. Of all these, it may be that the inhibitions are most difficult to understand and to control. It is much easier to override commands of the will which tell one he must do than it is to go against the order, "You must not do." Our Pilgrim Fathers, grim old men, are high examples of this. They were full of inhibitions as an egg is of meat, and, though they have been dead and gone for centuries, their descendants still suffer under, and cannot rid themselves of, the inhibitions implanted in their bone and blood by those cheerless forefathers. Which is something to ponder over.

Monday morning Donovan started the little journey to Odilon Turcot's. It was nine o'clock when he arrived, and Odilon—wonder of wonders—was in his store and not abroad gossiping and giving the neighbors the benefit of his Sabbath deliberations. Donovan entered, but in the beginning Odilon did not recognize him in the rather dim light. True, it had been a year since the men had met and Donovan was no little altered.

"M'sieu desires?" Odilon asked in his best manner. Then he stepped behind a barrel of flour as if he would utilize it as breastworks. "You, m'sieu!" he exclaimed. "Le Malcœur!"

Donovan smiled left-handedly. There were times when his title rasped his nerves. "I do not eat little merchants," he said, shortly. "Come out. I have come," he said, "to see your niece. Be so good as to inform her I am here."

"My niece!" Odilon exclaimed, open-mouthed.

"Exactly. I have come far to see her. Let her be informed."

"My niece!" Odilon repeated, as if there were some extraordinary and pregnant meaning in the words.

"March," said Donovan.

"But, m'sieu—the strangeness of it! There is the rub. My niece, as you say, is not."

"Is not!"

"Of a truth. Vanished. Disappeared. Flown."

Donovan reached a long arm and grasped the little man's shoulder. "What are you saying?" he demanded, Odilon's startled face close to his own.

"The girl," said Odilon, "is gone. When we arose this morning she was not. Her bed—it was as it lay the night before. She had not slept. . . . Her belongings—a part of them, and a so-small bag—they were vanished also. . . . My Delima—ah, it wrings the heart to see her!"

"Where has she gone? When did she go? What drove her away?"

"Alas, m'sieu, that is hidden from us! In the night she went, without doubt, but why or whither we may not guess. . . . My Delima and *ma mère* they will have it she was frightened away." He glanced sharply at Donovan. "Did she, by chance, know of your coming?"

"No," said Donovan.

"Then," said Odilon, "it must have been he. My mother declares it was so."

"He?"

"Cluny," said Odilon. "Yesterday he was here. I saw him drive away. For an hour he spoke with my niece, and when I entered the house she was distrait, and her cheeks were pale, m'sieu, and there was no gayety in her. Through the evening she was silent. And I know no more, m'sieu, save that she is gone."

Donovan's fingers crushed Odilon's shoulder, but when the little *marchand* looked up into the face above him, it was then he became frightened indeed. It was a face to furnish ample grounds for fear. But in an instant that look passed, to be

succeeded by another expression, cold, sneering—all but the eyes, and they did not sneer.

"So," said Donovan, "she has run off with this Cluny."

"But no, m'sieu. If anything, she has run off *from* this Cluny."

"Why should she run from him?"

"It would be well, m'sieu, if other young girls had run from him."

"Call your wife," said Donovan, and Odilon ran to obey, glad to leave that feared presence.

Delima he found in the attic where the loom was set, not working—a rare thing for that energetic body—but sitting with her apron before her face.

"Come," said Odilon, excitedly. "He sends for you. He demands to see you."

"Who demands?" Delima asked, dolefully.

"Le Malcœur."

"What does he want with me?"

"Is it for me to ask his desires? Go, thou! Run! Speed! Before he shall trample us all as is his custom."

Delima rose, drying her eyes, and went belowstairs.

"M'sieu wished to see me?" she asked.

"Where is your niece?" demanded Donovan.

Now Delima was a sorely tried and worried woman, and her temper, never of the most placid, flared out upon him.

"What is that to you?" she asked, sharply.

Donovan stared at her, and figuratively his jaw dropped. The question hit him between wind and water. True, what was Nérée Caron to him? What was the meaning of this emotion he suffered, for he did suffer? He had come, confident she would be there and that he should see her. But he had come too late—she was gone—and the resultant shock was bewildering. Or was not disappointment, but something

stronger, more shaking—more humiliating, perhaps. His purpose in coming had been what? To try his reinforced strength, to test himself in her presence; to discover if he, Donovan Steele, were as he labored to make himself, and as he believed he was, able to resist the appeal of beauty—able to resist the appeal of that quality in Nérée stronger than physical beauty.

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is nothing to me," he said, bleakly.

"Then take yourself away," said Delima. "Have we not enough of trouble in this house. We want no bullies here. We have no need for tramplers and arm-breakers. There stands the door—open."

"Be still," said Donovan, and it was his face more than the tone of his voice which compelled her to silence. She regarded him sulkily, but, for all that, with more respect. And as she comprehended the figure of a man that he was, as she read the strength and the weakness of his face, and perceived the smolder of his eyes—which was not happiness—she felt an emotion gentler than respect. Involuntarily she spoke.

"*Pauvre garçon,*" she said, impulsively.

Donovan's face hardened. Dared this *habitant* woman pity him? And why? What was there about him to cause pity to flow. In spite of him he was curious to know.

"Why do you call me poor boy?" he asked.

"Because," she said, and her voice was kind, "you are a poor boy. . . . How many years have you? And you think yourself so old and so wise—and so evil, perhaps. A boy you are in spite of it all, and the heart in you is most unhappy. Bad Heart, they call you, but that is no true name. Sick Heart it should be. I must think that some evil person has taken the youth of m'sieu and broken it. . . . When last did you laugh, *pauvre garçon?*" She dared repeat the epithet to his face.

"I think," said Donovan, caught unawares, "that I have never laughed."

"Then," said Delima, "you should make the good pilgrimage and the devotion to our Ste. Anne, and beg of her that she grant you the favor of laughter."

"Always this Ste. Anne!" he exclaimed, disdainfully. "What can she give to me? Your minds are touched with this Ste. Anne of yours."

"Aye," she said, touched with a knowledge of her compassion, and of the splendor of her place in heaven. Is it nothing to be mother to the Blessed Virgin? I ask you. What motherhood is more glorious than hers, save only that of the Virgin herself? We of this country know the good Ste. Anne—and all the world knows her. . . . Take you your sick heart to her, walk in procession, make your confession and pray for healing. It is not alone the twisted limbs nor the palsy nor the lingering illness that she cures."

"Gabble!" said Donovan, and, turning on his heel, he left the house abruptly.

Delima walked into the dining room, where she well nigh collided with Odilon, who had been peeping through the crack of the door, waiting tremblingly for the moment when his good wife should be destroyed before his eyes.

"He is gone?" he asked.

"As you see, lazy one."

"The saints be praised! Ah, there is a wicked man!"

Delima looked through the window at the retreating form of Le Malcœur as he strode toward his waiting carriage. "Wicked?" she said, and there was a rising inflection. "It maybe. Young, certainly. Most unhappy—that goes without saying. Also," she added, "I know that about him which he does not know himself. He loves my Nérée, and I think I am glad, for, whatever else he may be, he is a man."

"Le Malcœur loves our Nérée! . . . Now may Ste. Anne and St. Christophe and St. Didyme and all the other saints have her in their keeping."

"Perhaps," said Delima, "it is because they have taken thought of her need that they have sent this man."

"Then," said Odilon, with what approached impiety, "there must be a sudden madness in heaven."

"Not so," said Delima. "I think it is that the saints, and especially such as be women, have a wise eye in the choice of such men as are to be their instruments. . . . Now, get you to your gossiping, and inquire with care if any saw the girl go and which way she traveled, for I am sick with fear for her."

It was Gonzague the *charetier* who drove Donovan to and from Ste. Agnès—Gonzague, whose house was across the street from the *Salon de Barbier de premier classe,* and whose business cards announced in somewhat zigzag type that he was equipped with *"Voiture simple et double a la disposition des voyagers."* He was a garrulous man, who, when he was not shouting, *"Marche!"* to his reluctant horse, was dangling conversational bait before his passengers. He had little fortune with Donovan Steele, who curtly ordered him to be silent. Gonzague's face grew long and he hunched his shoulders in disgruntlement. Well, he could be as silent as any if the need be . . . but as for this Le Malcœur, from whom he had hoped to hear tales, why, undoubtedly all the evil spoken of him was true.

Donovan rode with his brooding eyes upon the horse's ears. So the girl was gone! He endeavored to shrug his mental shoulders. Well, so much for that. Let her go, for with her going one element of possible entanglement was removed from his life. He sneered. Run off with the man Cluny, undoubt-

edly—a successor to Leandre Savard's Odilie! Well, what was it to him which route she chose in going to the devil—or in sending some one else there! But he could not find a safe harbor in indifference, and her face, lovely, fine, splendid in its womanhood, insisted upon appearing sharply, clearly before his eyes. Nor could he pass with a shrug the fact that Cluny was involved in the matter. . . . He became conscious of his hands, which were clenched so that the nails bit into his palms. This was at thought of Cluny. And then he realised that he had known a certain thing from the beginning—and that thing was that Nérée Caron had not disappeared with Cluny. But Cluny was concerned in her going. Cluny had been at Odilon Turcot's house and spent an hour alone with Nérée, after which she had been troubled and silent—and in the morning she was gone. The inference favorable to Nérée's rightness, was that Cluny had frightened her away and that she had fled before his importunities. Yet, remembering her face as he did, recalling how she had stood up before the shock of his recognition of her, and in the moment when she had stood in danger of discovery by Xavier Caron, he could not make himself believe it was fear of the big man which had set her wings in flight. It went deeper than that—deeper than the apprehension of a girl for a predatory man. What then? It was a mystery.

Cluny and Xavier Caron and Nérée—how they seemed to be entangled with one another, and how he had managed to snarl his line with theirs! What touched one of them seemed to touch another, and a step toward one was a step toward all. As he drove between the pleasant hills it came to him that the four of them traveled down some dark, irresistible current toward a *débâcle*—toward some common calamity, some high climax. And yet he was no fatalist, or he would not have

planned for himself the life he planned nor molded his nature as he sought to mold it. Far from fatalism, his belief was that he could do as he would, could master events by ruthless determination. It was his manner of mastering events which had earned him his name.

Now he resolved, and put into the resolve all the iron of his soul, that he would forget Nérée Caron utterly. Whether she remained or vanished was no concern of his; she had merely been a symbol standing for a weakness which he feared—the weakness of being moved by his fellow men, of being turned aside from his purpose by a woman. The symbol was gone and would be forgotten. It is more simple to will forgetfulness than to accomplish it.

He had despised her, knowing her for what she was—a snare, a lure. Her beauty and that semblance of goodness were but the protective coloring which made it less difficult for her to approach her victims. She could look out of those clear, sweet eyes as she administered poison to a child! He forced himself to think of this matter, of the poisoning. He dwelt upon it, dangled it before his eyes, not realizing that he used it as a drowning man grasps a straw.

At last, vexed in spirit, he arrived again at La Malbaie and went to his room. This phase of his return was finished, not as he had intended, but, for all that, brought to an end and eliminated. What next? Work, he told himself, indifferently. He must work, for he must eat—and, the talk of the hotel informed him, jobs were to be had at La Chute.

But he did not go to La Chute on the next day. Instead, he hired Gonzague to drive him to St. Fidèle. He had to go to St. Fidèle and to Cluny, but if any man had suggested to him that the disappearance of Nérée Caron, and Cluny's implication in it, influenced his decision, he would have flown

into cold, dangerous rage. Nevertheless, the cause for his going to St. Fidèle was to wring from the man Cluny what he had done to Nérée and what had become of her. Wishers for the meeting between the men would have taken heart had they known this. Events were toward.

Chapter Seventeen

Nérée knew the roads of the parish and its neighbors, for had she not traversed them on missions to the bedsides of the sick, to assist gently at arrivals in remote places where the ministrations of a physician could not be afforded, and in keeping her sharp eye on the business of the homespuns. Though it was midnight when she tiptoed down the stairs in her stockinged feet, she had no hesitation through fear of losing her way. The difficulty was that she did not know which road to choose. It is true there were fifty *habitants* who would have taken her in gladly and given her of their best without question. They would, she knew, keep still tongues in their heads—but of what avail. Her presence was bound to leak out sooner or later and there would be a repetition of alarm and flight—or, perhaps, the opportunity for flight would not be given.

Her idea, in so far as it had crystallized, was to make for some distant village down the river, and there to seek passage on some inconspicuous boat for some little-frequented hamlet beyond Tadousac. Here, she believed, would be found a secure refuge. It was a direction in which business did not carry Cluny.

She had a choice of roads. If mere hiding was her purpose, she might have crossed the river and taken the old Chemin de Marais over the mountain, past the fishless twin lakes of Marais, and onward to the third Lake des Marais, in which trout abounded. This course would carry her almost due north into inclement country where none would think to seek for her; but she was a woman and must consider how she might exist. No, the Chemin des Marais, now frequented only by sportsmen,

would not serve her purpose. All this she considered as she trudged along through the darkness.

Indomitably she persisted until she found a crossing not distant from La Chute, and then took the road to Upper Fraser Falls and Lake Comporté, but took the fork to the southward just before she reached the house of Onesime Bouchard, whose wife she had nursed through pneumonia. This was a lonely road for a girl to travel at night—rough and lonely and filled with terrors after she left the plateau on which was the little farm of Damase Boulaine, where she had once arrived just in time to give the baby its first bath and to wrap it in warm flannels. From Damase's southward for a matter of miles this road traversed the bush, and no human being who has not been compelled to walk the lonely woods of a dark night can know what that means to one unaccustomed. It was near to morning again when she turned to the east again and reached the road running down to the river and the wharf at Cap à l'Aigle. This was not a good road, though riders on horseback frequently made use of it. She hesitated, but did not turn. It was too soon to seek the river, she told herself. On the contrary, she determined to continue, weary to exhaustion though she was, and hungry—for she had been tramping and resting, resting and tramping, now for hours, and the sun was high along the eastbound road. So, she believed, she would pass the village of St. Fidèle, leaving it to the southward, and then dare to veer toward the St. Lawrence. She was now in country she did not know, traveling roads with which she was unfamiliar.

It was no light undertaking upon which she was bent, to tramp many miles over rutted, mountainous roads, deep with mud in the lowlands, shelves of solid Laurentian granite in the uplands. It demanded a stout heart as well as stout shoes, but Nérée was equipped with both. Snow still lingered in

the ravines and the air was chill. Rain was always a possibility. At noon she paused on a downward slope, ate of her bread and cheese and drank from an icy brook. Fatigue overcame her there, in the shelter of the rock beneath which she rested, and, putting her back against the granite, she slept.

Fancy, if you can, a girl, reared as Nérée Caron had been, bathed from infancy in the sunshine of luxury, setting out on such a pilgrimage, tramping roads which would have worn out a hardy man! There, if you will, resided a sturdy heart and a resolution to compel the admiration. . . . Not a tear stained her cheek, no cry of distress had been wrung from her by aching muscles or tortured feet. She had persisted dauntlessly, as such as she must ever persist to the end.

After a time—an hour or more of troubled sleep—she awakened. Her eyes opened and stared about her briefly before realization of her whereabouts and her reason for being there came fully to her. She sat erect and turned—and as she turned she looked into the grimly smiling face of Cluny!

He leaned forward, resting his great bulk upon his elbows, and peered into her face with a curious intentness. . . . Nérée's first reaction was a spasm of fear; she cringed against her rock, shrinking from the man as from some horrible figure in a nightmare. She could withdraw her eyes from the wind-tanned massiveness of his face. The rock cut her back cruelly, but she only pressed the harder against it.

"You walked?" he asked.

Nérée could not reply. She turned her head from one side to the other, wrenching her eyes away from Cluny by a great effort, seeking some avenue of escape. There was none. Her flight was ended. Numb despair settled upon her.

"Doggone," said Cluny in English, "if you don't deserve better luck!" There was admiration in his eyes and in his voice. "If you'd sat in the shade instead of the sun, I'd never 'a'

seen you," he went on. "Just a matter of which side of the rock you picked—and you picked *my* side. Funny what little things make all the difference! . . . Slep' your sleep out?"

Nérée struggled to her feet, pushing herself up the harsh surface of the rock, and stood facing him. Her mind was unable yet to grasp the disaster—all that labor and suffering for nothing! Wasted!

"Just a matter of half a dozen feet," said Cluny, "and you'd 'a' got away. . . . Looks like it wasn't meant," he mused. "Seems you're kind of handed to me on a silver platter. . . . Well, I ain't goin' to complain."

Still she did not speak.

"Feet sore?" Cluny asked, with real compassion in his voice. . . . The man, as are all men, was a strange compound. There were excellencies in him and areas of softness. "Well, you won't have to walk no more. The carriage is waitin'. . . ."

Nérée prayed, silently, in agony. "Blessed Jesus," her heart cried, "deliver me from this man."

"Brace up," Cluny said. "I ain't such bad company." Then he dropped into French, and his manner took on something of the heritage of the tongue in which he spoke. "I've been considering you, mam'selle," he said, "and if you have fear that I shall betray you to Xavier Caron—or to the police—you need fear no more."

"You are going to let me go—you are? Oh, M'sieu Cluny, your heart is to be good!"

"Not so," he said, dryly. "My heart it will be found in good working order. Of a truth, it works very well indeed. But as for letting you go, mam'selle, where is the profit in that? No. No. I am taking you with me, *mignonne,* and you may depend upon me to protect you from Uncle Xavier. . . . Do you know, I have no liking for Uncle Xavier. . . . I

think"—and here he relapsed into English,—"I think I'll upset Xavier's apple cart."

"Take me with you!" Nérée gasped.

"To St. Fidèle. All shall perceive how I have a new cook." He laughed. "There you will be safe. And I—I shall give my mind to the matter of Uncle Xavier. Regard now—if you did not kill your brother, then some other did—and who else would profit? Why, Uncle Xavier! But if the crime fastens itself on Uncle Xavier, who then will profit? Why you, my little one—and it is my intention to share in the profits. Not so? All the wealth of the Caron family will belong to you, and you will belong to me. And there you have it."

Nérée, now that the worst was upon her and realized, faced him with the brave eyes which were her heritage from ancestors who had not feared to wear and to wield swords. "I will belong to God," she said.

"Eh?"

"I will go with you because I cannot help it. You are strong to compel me. If I struggle you can carry me. So I shall go, and you need not touch me. . . . But if, when we have arrived, you do not treat me in all things as God would approve, if you come close to me, touch me, threaten me, then I shall go to God."

"You are a Catholic," said Cluny, dryly.

"True," said Nérée, "but I shall not fear to stand before Him and make my explanation."

"As to that," said Cluny, "we shall see. I am a patient man and there is no requirement to make haste."

"Nor," said Nérée, "will I work for you, cook for you, lift my hand for you."

"Um. . . ." said Cluny. "Well, higher spirits than yours have been broken, mam'selle."

"Break mine if you can," said Nérée. It was a challenge,

and, perceiving the light which dwelt in her eyes and the high resolution of her face, Cluny knew a moment's doubt.

"Come," he said, shortly.

Obediently she followed him to the carriage, an affair of two seats, and climbed into the rear. Cluny grinned wryly, but did not attempt to force her into the seat where her body must touch his. . . . And so the journey to the camps below St. Fidèle began, winding upward and ever upward, with glimpses now and then of the gray St. Lawrence far below them, until they reached and traversed the little village of St. Fidèle, with its church and its bank for savings and its *forgeron*—and then downward again, past pastures of browsing sheep with biblike boards under their chins to prevent the jumping of fences. It was a wonderful country, beautiful, stirring to the imagination, peaceful and laden with contentment. Then, again, the road took a wilder, and more uncouth way, zigzagging so sharply downward that the horse must stumble and slip and claw at the pebbles for a foothold. Now, beneath them, as they rounded a shoulder, Nérée saw the river, free as yet of choking pulp wood—and then it vanished as they veered sharply again behind a screen of spruces.

No word had passed Nérée's lips, and for the most part Cluny had contented himself with directions to his horse. Now, however, he spoke.

"We are near," he said, and Nérée shuddered in spite of herself. They were near to the camp—but to what else were they contiguous. What rested in that place for her? Was it life or death? Was it unbearable misery or was it possible happiness? Whatever it was to be, she would meet it standing, nor should she know shame for her own behavior or for the behavior of any toward her.

"It is good fortune," said Cluny, "that I have an empty house. Not large, mam'selle, but sufficient. The manager

built it, and at times has lived there with his family. . . . I am lending it to you," he said with grim humor.

Now they reached the level and buildings appeared before them, rough, unpainted, unbeautiful buildings—houses of utility, shacks for the laborers, the living quarters and office of Cluny—and beyond the river and the bay with its great stretch of retaining wall of spiling, built, as Cluny told her with pride, according to his plan and under his eye. Now they crossed a little bridge and climbed again, the road making a steep, winding ascent of a sort of pinnacle on top of which Nérée could see a house.

"There," said Cluny, "is your home."

They drove past a barn and still upward to the back door of the little, green-painted house. Cluny stopped the horse and alighted with Nérée's bag. He did not offer to help her over the wheel, being wise and, as has been noted, patient. He waited for her on the steps, key in hand.

"It's ready to live in," he said. "We always keep it so in case the manager or his friends come up to fish. There's the woodpile. I'll send up food." He chuckled. "If you won't cook for me, you'll have to cook for yourself—or eat it raw. . . . And you might look around you. There's one way to leave, and that's across the bridge past my office. Don't try to get away, because it can't be done. You might say you're on deposit in the bank—and I'm a man to watch my savings. When I get around to it, I'll come up to see you."

With that he opened the door into the kitchen, tossed in her bag, and walked back to the carriage, into which he climbed without another word. Nérée watched him drive off down the hill, and, somehow, she feared him more in his forbearance, more in his self-control, in his ability to turn his back stolidly on his desires, than she had ever feared him before.

Now, for the first time, she was face to face with a new

dread. For the moment the threat which had hung over her for a year was forgotten. Xavier Caron, the police, her capture, paled beside this imminent thing—the menace of the man Cluny. If she were to protect herself she must take thought. As she stood, hesitating to enter the door, a picture of Donovan Steele became alight in her mind. Donovan Steele! Le Malcœur. . . . It was vain to think of him, for she was hidden, safely hidden, where no help could reach her, where only those resources which resided in her own heart and mind and body might avail.

At first she did not enter the house, but surveyed its surroundings and location. It was natural that the possibility of flight should first make demand upon her intelligence, and she walked about to see what way might be clear. It was as Cluny said. There was no egress from that promontory save across the bridge before his office. On two sides was the river St. Lawrence, deep, rock strewn, forbidding; on another side a cliff, dripping sheer for a hundred feet; the third side narrowed to the road and the bridge. As she stood upon the precipice she could look over the bay, the wharves, and far up the gap in the mountains down which flowed the river. . . . Forest, nothing but forest and water, met her eye, and as she leaned forward to peer down at the bridge she saw a man take his station there. She needed not to be told his purpose. Cluny had placed him there to prevent her escape.

It was then that she entered the house. If she were to defend herself, it must be here. But the house did not lend itself to any defense possible to her. The utmost she could do would be to lock herself in a room and reinforce the door by moving against it such furniture as her strength could handle. This she would do at night. . . .

She was weary, hungry—ill with fatigue and the hardships of the day and night, but she could not bring herself to lie

down. She would feel so helpless lying down; and if she did not busy herself fear would come. She opened the door and carried in wood with which to build a fire—and hard by the woodpile she saw an ax. This she carried into the kitchen and rested it against the table close to her hand. It was something. It gave her a straw to which to cling. An ax! There was something ironical in it, the idea of Nérée Caron of Montreal bringing into the house as a weapon for her defense so barbarous an instrument as an ax!

Perhaps fifteen minutes later a man rapped at the door and passed in to her a basket of food; presently he returned with a pail of water, and Nérée sat about preparing a meal. It was growing dark, so she lighted the oil lamp, and by its flickering light she ate hungrily; but food did not hearten her. . . . She dreaded the moment when she must sleep.

The place was silent; no voice, no sound of life, arose to her ears from below; no footstep approached up the road. Cluny, it appeared, was leaving her to think it over—or perhaps he bided his time until weariness should overmaster her and close her eyes in the slumber of the exhausted. . . . And she must sleep.

It were better to sleep prepared than to fall asleep in her chair, so she dragged the ax with her to the one bedroom, which was on the second story. First she sat down the lamp on a chest of drawers, then she moved the bed so that its top filled the single window. No one could enter there without pushing away the bed and arousing her. Next she moved articles of furniture against the bolted door. . . . And then, not removing her clothes, she threw back the blankets and crawled into bed. Such was her exhaustion that she lost consciousness immediately. Nor did she dream.

Chapter Eighteen

Cluny issued orders. "The first man who crosses that bridge," he said, waving his huge hand, "I will break him in two. Is it understood? No one is to go near the house without orders from me. See to it."

He did not wait for promises of obedience, but turned and went into his bare office. There was a flat-topped desk which had seen years of service, and there were two chairs of the kitchen variety. Along one wall was a sort of counter faced with doors giving into a cabinet where the accumulation of such an office might be stored, and above this counter was a narrow window through which employés might transact business with Cluny. He sat down in one of the chairs, propped his feet on the desk, and lighted a cigar of the variety he favored—a variety more famous for the quantity of them one could buy for a dollar than for their flavor—and gave himself to concentration upon his affairs.

First he took stock of assets in hand. First among these ranked Nérée Caron. He had her safe and considered her the ranking card in the game—to be played with astuteness. Second among his assets he counted a firm belief in Nérée's innocence of any crime. His reason, abetted by his observation, told her she was innocent. Long before he ever saw her he was convinced of this, as his conversation in the smoking compartment of the train from Quebec to La Malbaie had suggested a year ago—on that day when he had first encountered Donovan Steele. Next to his possession of Nérée's person he placed the value of this knowledge. But to realize it to the full it would be necessary to have proof. Well, he said to himself, there must exist proof. He did not believe

anyone had committed a crime in the world's history without leaving some evidence to be discovered of his guilt. It was essential, therefore, to place himself in a position to prove Nérée's innocence, and to place the guilt where it belonged.

Surface evidence had been so conclusive that the police had accepted it, he believed, and had run barking along no other trails. The police, like other human beings, are not given to futile labors. All the facts pointed to Nérée, and her flight corroborated the facts. No effort had been made to discover if it were possible any other hand than hers was concerned in the death of the Caron boy. Well, that was that.

Third in his assets he set down a firm belief that Xavier Caron had plotted the whole dreadful matter, had schemed it for years. He alone, so Cluny's astute mind informed him, had an adequate motive. He put himself in Xavier's place and gave consideration to the matter from that point of view. The basis of Xavier's plot was this, that Nérée had been hated by her young brother—and this was an unnatural thing. It must have been induced cleverly and over a long period of time. If Xavier Caron had schemed to turn the boy against his sister, some proof of the manner of it must be existent. It would be in Montreal.

What other evidence was there against the girl? A telegram from Quebec luring the boy from his home to that city, purchased candy, and the procurement of a deadly poison. All this must have been carefully arranged, and careful arrangements are certain to leave some faint trail behind them. This part of the evidence must be sought in Quebec. A journey to the Fort and to Montreal was indicated, and feasible, since his duties required him to visit Quebec at least once in the month.

Cluny lumbered to his feet and walked to the door. "I want Jean," he shouted, and presently a man of swarthy

complexion and black, coarse hair came into the room. That he was Indian, or of mixed blood, was apparent as he stood waiting, his lustrous eyes on Cluny's face.

"Jean," said the big man, "I have a thing for you to do—you and your brother Joseph. If it is done well there will be five dollars a day for each of you on my return."

"*Oui,*" said Jean.

"There is a young woman in the manager's house."

"*Oui.*"

"I desire that she is still there when I come back."

Jean nodded his understanding.

"Also," said Cluny, "it is my wish that none shall cross the bridge or speak with her."

"*Oui,*" said Jean.

"Five dollars for you—five for your brother Joseph—each day."

"*Oui,*" said Jean.

"The work begins to-night," said Cluny. "That is all."

Jean turned on his heel and walked silently out of the office. Cluny passed through his dining room and entered his bedroom, where he removed his clothing, and presently was snoring in a manner which must have made him the dread of all hotel-keepers and the terror of a sleeping car. . . . Long before Nérée awoke in the morning Cluny was well on his way to catch the morning train from La Malbaie.

So early was his start that he was in town before Donovan Steele was on the road to St. Fidèle, and so they did not meet. Donovan arrived before Cluny's office, tossed his turkey out of the carriage, paid the driver, and strode up the steps.

"Where's Cluny?" he demanded.

"Gone to Quebec," said a man.

Cluny gone to Quebec! Donovan peered at the man icily. "To return when?" he asked.

"Two days, three days—who knows?"

"Where's the bunk house?" Donovan asked.

"Cluny said no jobs."

Donovan's wintry eyes made the man exceedingly uncomfortable with their stare. "There is always a job for me," he said. "But that can wait till Cluny comes back. Where is the bunk house?"

"There," said the man, pointing.

Donovan picked up his turkey and strode to the building indicated, and selected coolly a bunk out of which he tossed its owner's belongings.

"Hey, you, what do you do?" demanded a man who sat beside the stove, drying his socks. His voice was truculent and he got to his feet threateningly.

Donovan placed his turkey on the appropriated bunk before he answered. "What is it to you?" he asked.

"That is my bunk," said the man, advancing.

"*Was* is the word you should use, my friend. It was your bunk. It *is* my bunk."

"That," said the man, "we shall see." But a second plucked him by the sleeve.

"Eh, Hyacinthe," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "step softly. It is Le Malcœur. I know. I have seen him in Chicoutemi."

Le Malcœur! At the name Hyacinthe stopped abruptly and the aggression left his face. "Are you Le Malcœur?" he asked.

"So I am called."

Hyacinthe stepped back with a bow. He smiled ingratiatingly. "M'sieu," he said, "it is an honor to offer you my bunk—a great honor. Not so? Can I be of other service to m'sieu?"

"No," said Donovan, shortly, and sat down on the blanket to stare before him bleakly. Well, he was here. At last he

had come to St. Fidèle—and Cluny was not there. The coming was not as he had pictured it; it was flat, robbed of its melodrama. The few men in the big room stirred uneasily and, one by one, softly withdrew to spread the news. Donovan remained alone. Events baffled him and he was troubled by a bewildering uneasiness. First he had sought out Nérée Caron, and she was gone. Now he came to Cluny's place, and he was absent. The unexpectedness of it destroyed his poise. . . . Why, he demanded of himself, had he come to this place? What had moved him to a descent upon St. Fidèle. In the moment he was honest with himself. It was something more than Cluny's presence and Cluny's challenge which had brought him. He came to find out, if he could, what had become of Nérée Caron. Not that he cared what had become of her, he insisted, but to prove to himself, who needed no further proof, the general wickedness of her sex. But even as he insisted that this was the reason, he knew it was not the reason. However much he might tell himself that Nérée had run away with Cluny, he knew it was not so. Nevertheless, he would not admit he came to seek her, to demand from Cluny the reason for her flight and her destination. The time was not yet when he could make this admission.

At noon he dined in the cook shanty as if it were his right to do so, and, in the afternoon, watched covertly by many eyes and whispered about by many lips, he walked aimlessly about the place. Chance did not draw him to the bridge and its sentinel, nor did curiosity draw his eyes to the house upon the promontory. Instead he walked out upon the long finger of boards connecting shore with wharf, examining the loading machinery; stood grimly staring out upon the river—striving, always striving, to avoid his own thoughts. Something was not well with him. He was wrought upon as he had not

been wrought upon for a year, and his unease of spirit made him savage and dangerous. During those hours he was Le Malcœur indeed. And always, always, with a maddening insistence, Nérée Caron's face arose before him, now as he had first seen her on that dreadful night in Quebec, again as he had studied her in Odilon Turcot's dining room. There was, it seemed, no escaping from the thought of her.

At night he ate silently, sitting elbow to elbow with other men at the long table of planks, but addressing none—and the table was curiously still. There was, on that evening, none of the usual joviality, none of the shouts and songs and rough badinage with which the woodsmen celebrated the end of a day of labor. It was as if all rested under an apprehension, as if each was afraid to stir to movement the smoldering thing that slept behind Donovan's eyes.

Since he spoke to Hyacinthe at noon he had not addressed, nor had he been accosted by, any—and in silence he went to bed in Hyacinthe's bunk. . . . Such was his first day in St. Fidèle—a day of such agitation of spirit as made him hate the spot, made him despise all mankind with a renewed and bitter hatred.

As the day came to an end for him, so it closed for Nérée Caron—separated from Donovan by but a few hundreds of yards of space. It had been a dreadful day of waiting, of fears, of listening each moment for a heavy, threatening footfall. She had awakened early. From her window, past the head of her bed, she peered downward fearfully. No sign of life was to be seen nearer than upon the road half a mile away. She moved her furniture from before the door and descended to the kitchen, and there she stopped, startled, terrified, for a face was pressed against the window and black, gleaming eyes stared in at her. As she looked the face withdrew and vanished. . . . But she could hear soft footfalls

without, walking around and around the house, prowling, panther-like.

She crept to the window and watched, kneeling upon the floor below the sill for concealment. Presently she saw the Indian, Jean, walk past, his eyes upon the house—always upon the house, searching door and window—never more than a dozen feet from the walls. There was something so grim, so silent, so watchful in his movements that a terror of the very silence of the place filled her. She fought against it, fought against that dread of empty rooms, of creaking noises, of the wind through the trees without, of that stealthy pad, pad of the Indian's ceaseless sentry-go.

By sheer power of will she compelled herself to rebuild the kitchen fire and to set about the preparation of a meager breakfast. This eaten, she dared more. She opened the kitchen door and stood upon the steps, waiting. The Indian made his circuit and, coming upon her suddenly, stopped and fixed her with his piercing eyes.

"Who are you?" she demanded, striving to keep the trembling from her voice.

"Jean," he said, flatly.

"What do you here?"

"Watch," he said.

"Watch. What do you watch?"

"You," said Jean.

Her hand flew to her throat. It was terrifying to hear, yet she had known from the beginning that this must be the man's purpose.

"Why do you watch me?" she asked.

Jean's white teeth showed in a saturnine grin. "You must not go away," he said, "so I watch. I and my brother—we watch."

"Cluny set you to guard me?" she asked.

"Yes, Cluny."

"Where is he?"

"Gone to the Fort."

"To Quebec?"

"So it is said."

"When? When did he go?"

"This morning."

"Why?" she asked, anxiously. His going was ominous. What did it portend. He had said he did not intend betraying her to Xavier Caron, yet what else could have taken him away so soon after he found her and compelled her to St. Fidèle and this imprisonment.

Jean shook his head. He did not know.

"When will he return?"

"Three days. Four days." He shrugged his shoulders. "Now you go in the house. It is easier to watch when you are in the house."

Without a protest she turned, entered, and closed the door behind her, and then, drawing the shades so spying eyes could not follow her every movement, she sank trembling in a chair—and prayed.

So, in terror, in foreboding, passed the dreadful day and brought on the more dreadful night. And, as hour succeeded hour, there came over her a sort of resignation, a fortitude, a wonderful, comforting sense that, helpless as she might be, yet there was a Power which, if it willed, could keep her from all harm. Deserted as she appeared to be by Heaven, she did not turn against God, but rather approached Him more closely. In all the evils which had overtaken her, in all the horrors and hardships, she had not wavered so much as an instant in her simple faith. Where, for matters not so

malign as those which clutched her in inexorable fingers, Donovan Steele had turned bitter, had expelled God from his life, and had hardened and chilled his heart against his fellow men, Nérée Caron became only the firmer in her faith, the more trustful in the hidden purposes of her God, and her heart knew a deeper, sweeter, more compelling sympathy with men and women, like herself, who were set to work out such tasks as had been given them to the best of their slender abilities. She knew no bitterness, no hatred. It was as if she had been purged and cleansed and made more lovely of soul.

Many, many times in that long day did she tell the tale of her beads, and in the devotion found much comfort; but when she knelt beside her bed in the darkness, after blocking her door against possible intruders, she poured out her heart in simple words—in words which deserved, and undoubtedly did, reach to such lofty understanding and unexcelled compassion as to pass the understanding of man.

Then she crept into bed in that gulf of darkness and silence, and even though there reached her ears the stealthy, ceaseless tread of the sentinel without, she ceased to fear and was able to hope.

Perhaps that childlike prayer, ascending from her lovely lips and lovelier heart, was the deciding element in the drama. It may be that it was this moment, and not that later, tenser, more objectively dramatic moment, which was the grand climax. Who shall say? The thing may have been decided then and there—or it may be that the Powers which have the decision left the matter in lower hands, thinking so to give vexed and troubled souls their opportunity to struggle from darkness to day; vouchsafing them this chance to lose or to gain that thing which, for want of a surer name or a more certain

knowledge, men have taught themselves to call their immortal souls.

In the test, if test there were, lay involved the souls of Xavier Caron, of Cluny—and last, but perhaps more in need of trying and proving than any, the vexed and turbulent soul of Donovan Steele.

Chapter Nineteen

It was by chance and not by design that Donovan discovered the "other job," as it was called. In the bunk house a woodsman mentioned it, saying that plenty of jobs were to be had there.

"What's this other job?" Donovan asked.

"One Cluny's looking after back yonder," said the man.

"How far?"

"Ten-twelve miles."

"This company?"

"That, m'sieu, I do not know. I have not been there. But, from stories, the cutting is not on this company's land."

"On whose land, then?"

"It lies close to the signoury of the mill at La Chute."

"The Caron signoury?"

"That is the name."

Cluny cutting pulp off the Caron lands. That was a thing to think about. In those days Donovan wasted little time in speculation when direct investigation would answer better. Between breakfast and luncheon he set out—and between another breakfast and luncheon he returned. It was true. Cluny was cutting on the Caron signoury, and covering the operation with such secrecy as was possible, and Donovan had no doubt whatever here was the job offered him a year ago by Xavier Caron and Cluny. It was a thing to know, and he stored it in a readily accessible pigeonhole of his mind. Xavier and Cluny were robbing Nérée Caron. Well, he said to himself, let them rob.

It was not until the afternoon of the second day thereafter that he attempted to stroll across the bridge carrying the

road leading up the hill to the manager's house. He merely strolled that way without intention. In the middle of the span Jean's brother Joseph barred the way.

"You cannot cross here," he said.

Donovan looked at the man with cold curiosity. "And why?" he asked.

"It is forbidden."

"By whom?"

"M'sieu Cluny."

Such was Donovan's state of mind in those days that any opposition was a challenge to him. To follow the bent of his own will was a matter which had risen to the height of a passion, an obsession. He would allow none to command or forbid—but would set his own course and steer it by his own compass, regardless of hazards or obstructions. Perhaps this was a species of madness; more likely it was but an extremity arrived at in his revolt against all that life had been to him before the great break.

"M'sieu Cluny does not forbid me," he said, without passion, but in a voice which Joseph recognized as dangerous, for he drew back to seize a peavey handle kept ready by him for emergencies. Donovan's teeth gleamed a moment as he stepped forward and struck—struck savagely, ruthlessly—and Joseph had no further use for his bludgeon that day. Donovan wiped his knuckles on the seams of his trousers and climbed the hill in leisurely fashion. Curiosity was now excited. What had Cluny on that promontory that strollers must not come upon? He determined to find out.

Toward the top the road turned sharply to the right and then debouched upon the little plateau in the midst of which stood the manager's house. Donovan paused to scrutinize it, and as he did so Jean, keeping up his sentry-go, rounded the corner and came into view. Donovan, unobserved,

watched the man while he made two complete circuits of the building. The least discerning observer would have perceived that the man was a guard.

With a curious tenseness that was akin to elation, that contained a touch of excited expectancy, Donovan walked forward. In that instant he knew what he would find there, who he would find. . . . Jean saw him and halted, motioning with his hand to keep his distance, but Donovan walked ahead slowly. Nothing could have held him back now. Somehow he felt—some intuition told him—that he was nearing the great moment which had drawn him again to the neighborhood of La Malbaie. In his eyes was an eagerness which had not shown in them since boyhood. His face seemed younger, less set, mobile, expressive. As he crossed that clearing it might have been the face of the boy who came to Quebec with his friends and his sweetheart a year before.

"Stop!" said Jean.

"There was a man on the bridge," said Donovan, "who tried to stop me. Better go look after him. He's hurt."

"Eh? What do you say?"

"I am going to the house," said Donovan.

"No."

"Have you not heard, my friend, that where Le Malcœur says he will go, there he goes?"

Jean hesitated, gave back a step, looked about him as a man looks who is shaken as to his courage. He had heard this Le Malcœur was in camp, but, such had been his duties, that he had not seen the individual about whom he had heard such tales.

"But, m'sieu—it is forbidden," he stammered.

"Go down to the bridge," said Donovan. *Marche!*"

There are moments when an evil name is a possession of value. Jean wavered, rubbed his chin with fingers which were

not steady, and, daring to lift his eyes to Donovan's bleak gaze, gave way—nor, having started, did he pause. Donovan heard him crashing off down the hillside.

Then the door opened and Nérée stood upon the steps!

He did not move or speak. Curiously, he felt a physical weakness, a rush of some unwelcome emotion which he would not recognize as a great gladness and relief. And then she turned her head and their eyes met. Involuntarily her arms stretched toward him.

"M'sieu—M'sieu Steele!" she cried, tremulously. "Thank God!"

The words reached his ear, and they startled him, bewildered him. He had heard aright and this girl thanked God for his presence. She spoke as if his appearance were in answer to prayer. He moved toward her numbly, and when he stood at the foot of the steps he spoke. His voice was cold, level, inclement.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Oh," she cried, "you have come! You are here! I am safe."

Safe! Because he was here she was safe. The thing was impossible, absurd. He resented it. How dared she involve him in her affairs, look to him as a protector?

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Last night," she said, "and the night before that—since he brought me here—I have prayed. And God has sent you."

"If God sent me," he said, somberly, "he failed to mention it to me. I am not running errands for your God."

"Yet you are here," she said, simply.

"My coming had nothing to do with you."

"Does God always reveal his purposes to his instrument?" she asked.

"God, as I have become acquainted with his ways," Dono-

van said, bitterly, "generally reveals his purposes by tearing out your heart and twisting it in his fingers."

She smiled, and his fists clenched at the sweetness and the trustfulness of it. "I am afraid," she said, "you have mistaken another for Him."

He lifted his shoulders. "What are you doing here?" he asked again.

"It was Cluny," she said. "He discovered—that I am Nérée Caron—and he came to Ste. Agnès. Then, in the night, I ran away. I was going to hide—I don't know where—but I walked and walked through the darkness, and it was dreadful. Do you not find the night terrible, M'sieu Steele? And then I was so weary I slept and Cluny found me under a rock and compelled me to come here. He put this man to guard me and has gone to Quebec. I think to tell what he knows to my Uncle Xavier. And yet—I do not know. Cluny knows I am innocent."

"Cluny knows what?" The question was torn from him by surprise.

"Cluny knows I did not kill my brother," she said, "as you know it, M'sieu Steele."

"I do not know it," he said; but she only smiled.

"I think," she said, "that you do not know what you know. Ah, you are sick, M'sieu Steele. It is a dreadful illness, and when you have taken me away so that I shall be safe, you must go to Ste. Anne de Beaupré and pray for a miracle. I grieve to see this sickness upon you."

There it was again. So Leandre Savard had spoken to him, in almost identical words. . . . Leandre Savard! His old companion had told him to take his malady to Ste. Anne—and he had jeered. Curiously, Donovan did not like to think of Leandre—nor of the thing Leandre had done in La Malbaie. He had been shaken by that thing, shaken to his foundations.

But, he told himself, Leandre must be the exception to prove his rule that all men are faithless and lusting for the moment when they may betray. Yet Leandre had always been faithful to him—and then, that morning on the hotel veranda, Leandre had shown a heart so big, so filled with a steadfast love, so great in its forgiveness and in its compassion, that Donovan had been rocked and shaken by the sight of it. No, he did not like to think of Leandre.

"Wait," she said, "I will put my few things in my bag, and then you shall take me away. . . . You came to take me away."

"No," he said. "It is no affair of mine. What are you to me? Why should I meddle?"

"Because," she said, softly, "you cannot help yourself."

"Listen," he said sharply. "I will tell you why I came back to La Malbaie. It was to see you—to be in your presence again—and to go away. It was to prove to myself that I am stronger than you, and that you cannot, for all your loveliness and the lying goodness of your face, and your plotting and planning, tangle my life up with yours. That is why I came, and do you think I am going to be such a fool as to go away with you—to rescue you from whatever you fancy you need rescuing from—and saddle myself with you? I will not. Go into the house. Leave me alone. It makes no difference to me what becomes of you."

Nérée regarded him a moment silently, sorrowfully. "Poor boy!" she said. "Wait. I will be but a moment."

"I will not wait."

"We must hurry before Cluny comes," she said.

"Do you think I will run from Cluny?"

"No, M'sieu Steele," she said. "I think you would run from no man—and that is why I prayed for you to come."

"If you knew," he said, harshly, "how I despised you—and

all women! You lie and cheat and betray. . . . And you—what are you but a living lie! Tell me, if you can, what woman has done a thing more treacherous, more abhorrent, than you have done . . . and yet you look as if you had been created to be a picture of virtue and goodness." He laughed bitterly. "It is the sort of disguise your God delights to create."

"It was a wicked thing to wound you as you have been wounded," she said, simply. Then, of a sudden, her face changed, whitened. Her big eyes became bigger with fear and she drew a sharp breath as she shrank back against the door. "It is too late," she whispered. "He has come—Cluny."

Donovan wheeled to look. Just mounting the plateau at a lumbering run came Cluny. Donovan was glad—it came as a relief from a perplexity which, it seemed to him, was incapable of solution. There was no perplexity now, no doubt, no uncertainty. For there was Cluny, and in his heart of hearts Donovan was glad.

He was cool now, and his mind as clear as it had been confused but a moment before—cool to look about him and to choose the spot on which the meeting must take place, cool to plan how the meeting should take place, and how, when they met body to body, he would fight his fight. That it was to be his great fight he knew; that never in his turbulent year had he met such a man as the bulky Cluny he was certain. Nor was he deceived by Cluny's bigness. It was not the girth of obesity, not the ponderousness of the overfed animal; rather that huge body approaching him was all bone and sinew—and deceivingly quick. Nor had he a doubt of Cluny's courage. The man would fight until he won or until he could no longer lift hand or foot, and he would not choose with nicety the manner of his fighting. Well, if need be, Donovan could match him there—match him with a chill ruthlessness which

was the equal of Cluny's more passionate, more audible ferocity.

That the pair should meet was a thing written and unavoidable. Both had known it—and, as for Donovan—he was glad the meeting must be now. It came as a welcome diversion. He smiled grimly and walked a few steps forward to a level bit of ground, free from outcropping bowlders. He had quite forgotten Nérée Caron. In this elemental climax the complexities of life vanished, became of negligible import. Then he heard her voice.

"Donovan! Donovan!" she called, in an agony of apprehension.

"Be still," he said, sharply.

"He— Oh, I have brought this upon you!"

He turned his head and flung a sentence over his shoulder at her. "You," he said, "have nothing to do with it. Go in the house and be quiet."

"Donovan!" she cried again, and he frowned as he noticed how she was using that name, but he did not turn his head. "Donovan!" she called, tremulously—and then, seeing that he did not heed her and that the men were drawing close together, she fell silent, fearing to distract him, to annoy him, to weaken him in this hour when he would require all the strength and cunning, all the courage and stamina, all the resources physical and spiritual with which he was endowed.

But she prayed silently, in her terror, and it was a strange prayer, one that it was as well Donovan Steele did not overhear. "Sweet Jesus," she said, passionately, in her heart, her secret heart whose utterance was audible only to ears attuned to the chord of divine compassion, "bring him back to me. Bring him back to me."

Chapter *Twenty*

It was a spectacle which no woman, save she were inhuman, would behold willingly, yet, such was the savage fascination of it, such the primal splendor of its display of courage, the marvel of physical strength to withstand, the elemental, animal skill and resource, that no woman, compelled to see the commencement could turn away her eyes before the end. Perhaps in all, two dozen human beings saw that meeting of two men, thrown up to the pinnacle of pre-eminence by a vast region in its relentless demand for the fittest. But those who in after days were to speak of it in hushed and wondering voices numbered their thousands. It was epic—such a fight as in more ancient days would have found its fit place in epic song. Vast, shadowy figures enshrined in the Nibelungen Lied would have welcomed with rattling of spears and lifting of drinking horns these two men to their great company.

Cluny's bull rush up the steep road to the plateau abated to a walk and he made his progress across the uneven ground slowly, warily. Brain mastered savage rage and now he took his time, and would take more time that he might not arrive at this, which he recognized as his supreme test, breathless and at disadvantage. Donovan, having selected his spot, waited. Ten feet from the young man Cluny halted, not from lack of eagerness, but to give himself further moments to recover from that rapid climb. And so they stood, fronting each other—and Nérée was appalled by the sure knowledge that both the men reveled in the moment, welcomed it, rejoiced.

She compared them—Cluny's massive bulk, his face, not heavy now, but alight and mobile; Donovan tall, slender, bronze, handsome in a cold, feline way. Bulk and tremendous

strength faced slenderness and speed. Somehow Cluny did not look so old in this moment. His age might have been forty. Donovan looked older than his years—nevertheless, to Nérée the meeting was between youth and maturity. Cluny was as tall, or even taller than Donovan, and his bulk continued from crown to toes. Massive legs ending in enormous feet upheld girth and tremendous depth of chest and width of shoulder. He did not taper downward, but seemed as huge at the ground as at the shoulder. As for Donovan, his was a body to mold in marble. His head, small, shapely, rested upon a corded, splendid neck. His shoulders—lacking little of the breadth of Cluny's, stood for the base of an inverted pyramid. Lean waist and hips molded into long, shapely, sinewed legs. Hermes pitted against Hercules!

"Well," said Cluny, with a shrug, "you're here."

"I'm here," said Donovan.

"Kind of a hero, eh? Rescuing pretty young women."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders.

"Know who she is?" Cluny asked, struck suddenly by the possibility.

"Yes."

"And that's *that*," said Cluny. Then he laughed shortly. "Beats all what a handsome girl can get men into. She is pretty, ain't she?"

Donovan's eyes did not turn, as Cluny had, perhaps, hoped. "Just now," he said, "I'd rather look at you. Have you got your breath?" The question was a sneer.

"Got ample to suffice," said Cluny, and then, with an agility which had no kin to his bulk, he charged. It was swift, well considered to catch his adversary unawares, but this was not Donovan's hour to be taken by surprise. It seemed to Nérée that Donovan stepped forward directly into a flurry of sledge-hammer blows, but no human eye, even those skilled in watch-

ing such affairs, can ever tell exactly what happens in a moment like that. Nérée gasped, for to her eyes those swinging fists of Cluny's were battering Donovan's face—but it was not so. Instead, when they were chest to chest, it was Donovan's skilled right fist which worked like a piston, traveling never more than a dozen inches in the wickedest, most punishing blow known to the prize ring—the jab to the body in the region of the heart. With such a blow, struck by a man who knows how to strike, an opponent may be lifted bodily from his feet. Three times Donovan's knuckles sunk in Cluny's body, and the big man grunted. It taught Cluny his lesson. Though his antagonist was lighter than he, there was numbing force behind his blows. He could not, as he had done in so many fights, crush Donovan by sheer weight, taking what blows his lighter antagonist could deliver in order himself to strike one deciding blow. Cluny had been accustomed to take ten blows to deliver one, but that one had generally been sufficient. It might be sufficient now, but he could not afford to pay the price for it. Now, for minutes they fought warily, each seeking an opening, each testing out the other craftily. Donovan was a panther, crouching, circling his mountainous enemy, jabbing, jabbing with his left fist maddeningly. It was a blow which cut, irritated, confused, but did not damage. Donovan took a savage, relentless delight in cutting Cluny's face to ribbons—but, shifting about on the balls of his feet, did not risk setting himself for a blow which would carry the weight of his hundred and eighty pounds behind it. It was cruel—that clean science used to torture, to madden. His teeth showed white in a sneering smile as he stepped in and out, weaved here and there, avoiding those swings of Cluny's, swings with the power of a striking lion's paw behind them. A dozen times he thrust his seasoned knuckles into Cluny's face, but he was not so fatuous as to overestimate the ultimate value of those blows. They

served but to arouse Cluny's anger. And Cluny bided his time. Never yet had he met an opponent whom he could not hit once—and once, he was sure would be enough. If it did not end the fight it would numb the faculties, sap the strength, weaken the knees so that another mighty charge, a hurricane of blows not to be avoided, would crush, batter, destroy consciousness and bring victory.

Neither man spoke a word. They fought in deadly silence, and there was no sound save the drawing of their breath, the shuffling of their feet, the thud of arm guarding blow, of fist striking flesh. A trickle of blood ebbed from a corner of Cluny's mouth; his face was losing its contours. Donovan was untouched, cool, pale of face and lips, but in his eyes glittered the light of steel, the light of steel endowed with malign, cruel life.

Now Cluny rushed again, and Donovan met it as before, but this time with less good fortune, for one of those sweeping smashes of Cluny's crashed through his guard, and that fist, big as a ham and hard as oak, impinged upon his cheek bone just below the eye. If it had been the point of the chin there might have been no more to say, as it was it lifted Donovan cleanly from his feet and sent him, feet flying above his head, to the ground. It was a terrible blow, a deadening, blinding, dizzying blow. For an instant Donovan's eyes glazed and his mouth dropped open. For an instant he lay upon his back groping for the ground with hands which refused to obey. But there condition, the training of hard labor, of battling the woods and the rivers, paid its tribute to him. He shook his head to clear it of the gray fog which obscured his vision and got to his feet—in time. He could not think, could not reason. Only instinct and the indomitable will of the natural fighting man carried him through the minutes which succeeded. He never remembered them, did not know how he conducted.

But for all that Cluny could not batter him down, could not shift to send home another of those annihilating blows.

Then, as he fought, Donovan's head cleared, his eyes regained their vision. Until he should be himself again he fought only to avoid Cluny and nothing more. But this was no fair fight, in squared circle with a referee to watch with knowing eye. It was a battle in the woods, whose sole object was to destroy, and that by any means at hand. There were no rules, no inhibitions; there was neither chivalry nor sportsmanship. Cluny's hands, which had been fists, unclenched, and when again Donovan slashed for his face, the big man seized Donovan's left arm in his mighty grasp and jerked—jerked so that Donovan left his feet as he came headlong. But in that fraction of a second he had time to lift his knee, so that, when their bodies met, it struck Cluny's stomach like a battering ram. Cluny grunted and writhed under the agony of it, but his great arms shut around Donovan, pinning the young man's right arm to his side. And then began the process of crushing his ribs. Donovan was lifted so that he stood on tiptoe. With his left fist he did what could be done, jabbing, jabbing, jabbing Cluny under the ear. Cluny's chin was buried in his shoulder blade and slowly, slowly he bent Donovan backward, squeezing the breath from him, twisting his spine, squeezing with arms, and thrusting with chin in an effort to break Donovan's back. It seemed the beginning of the end. The pain was excruciating, unbearable, blinding. Donovan coughed horribly and went limp in Cluny's arms. For another second Cluny hugged, and then loosened his grip to hurl Donovan to the ground where he might exercise the victor's right to trample him.

But then, as the arms loosened, that limpness departed from Donovan's body and it became steel wire. His knee lifted with all its force to sink into Cluny's abdomen and his left fist

sought the big man's jaw. He was free, and then Nérée saw what she would remember in dreams, a thing of fury, a thing of relentless savagery, a man gone mad with battle. The advantage of surprise was now with Donovan and he was upon Cluny like a black puma, risking everything, avoiding nothing, striking, striking with every ounce of the force which resided in his clean, steel-muscled body. To the chin, to the body, once, twice, three times he struck with all his might, and received no blow in return. Cluny was shaken, staggered. Twice more Donovan struck, driving that great bulk before him waveringly. Cluny's were the eyes to glaze, his knees to weaken, but Donovan could not batter him from his feet. Nor could Cluny close with him to save himself. All he could do was to cover his chin with one arm and his abdomen with the other, but it was unavailing. Inexorable as fate Donovan stood the required distance away and picked the target for his blows, and Cluny sagged under them. Never had Nérée dreamed such ruthlessness, such remorseless determined savagery, could reside in a man, and she shuddered while she was compelled to admire. She had seen Donovan snatch victory from defeat—and now, in *his* moment of victory she would not have stopped him if she could. Something of the lust of battle entered into her, and she leaned forward, tense, thrilled, trembling, agonized to see the end.

The stamina of the man was appalling. It seemed, so powerful were the life forces of him, that he could not be battered from his feet, smashed into unconsciousness. Even as he stood, all but helpless before Donovan, the mark for a dozen blows which would have ended the fighting of another man, it seemed as if Donovan could not bear him down. It was grim, terrible. His head wabbled on his shoulders, his jaw dropped, his eyes were half open, but his vitality—a vitality

such as we associate only with the more frightful of the jungle beasts—persisted.

The hand before his chin dropped, and Donovan, standing crouched, ready—menacing, set himself for the blow and struck with all his strength. Cluny went to his heels, tottered there, and measured his length upon the ground. But even then consciousness remained and a dreadful, dogged determination. As Donovan bent over him he raised himself to his elbows, his face working horribly; floundered to get his knees under him; gurgling and growling in his throat. Had the places been reversed Cluny would have stamped Donovan into the ground with his feet, but Donovan had a sort of pride in clean workmanship—not from sportsmanship or from chivalry, but because he liked to do a job in the way he liked to do it, with clean blows of the fist and not with feet or teeth. So he bent over Cluny waiting for him to rise.

The man got to his knees and groped there blindly, his fingers opening and closing—and they closed upon something—something hard, serviceable. The touch seemed to revive him, to bring him back to a certain consciousness, to renew his lost hope. The thing upon which his fingers closed was a length of stovewood from Nérée's pile—and then, he who had been all but unconscious, all but helpless, sagged back on his haunches, and with the suddenness of a snake striking, lashed out at Donovan's face with the edged, heavy club. There was a crack as of wood striking sharply upon stone. Nérée saw Donovan's hands lift, saw him reel, stagger backward, turn in a complete circle, and slump to the ground. Even as she screamed and ran toward him Cluny, unable to get to his feet, dropped to all-fours like some great bear, and began slowly, so slowly, with such vindictiveness, to work his way toward Donovan that Nérée screamed again and ran as she

had never run before. She reached Donovan's side and shook him by the arm.

"Donovan! . . . Donovan!" she cried, but he did not stir, though it seemed in the darkness of his mind that some one, a great distance away, was calling him through a black tunnel.

"Donovan! . . . Donovan!" she cried again. "He's coming! . . . Wake up! . . . Wake up!" She tugged at him, dragged at his shoulders to compel him to sit upright. And now Cluny was at Donovan's feet, dragging himself inexorably closer.

Nérée, in an agony of terror, grasped Donovan's cheeks in her hands and shook his head. "Wake up. . . . Open your eyes. . . . You've got to open your eyes," she wailed—but as she cried her heart told her it was in vain. That dreadful ridge across his forehead, just above the eyes, from which blood welled slowly, told her no effort could rouse him. And then Cluny brushed her aside and slumped forward upon Donovan's body, feeling for his throat. But he was too far gone. His fingers would not do his bidding, and for moments he lay prone upon his adversary, unable to move, harmless as so much weight in clay.

Then Donovan stirred, opened his eyes, but in them was a strange, blank stare. His hands moved upward, and it could be seen that his mind was making an effort to command his body. Each man groped now blindly for the other. Then, as if will had conquered flesh and pain and unconsciousness, Donovan's body twisted as Cluny's hands found his throat. He tore them away, grappled, twisted Cluny uppermost, kicked himself free, and got waveringly to his feet. And again Nérée took note of that strange sightless stare in his eyes.

Cluny, too, got to his knees and compelled himself upward, clinging to Donovan's legs. And so they were upon their feet again, face to face, chest against chest. Donovan's hand

fumbled for Cluny's shoulder, found it, and clutched there. He drew back a step, and, as if using his left hand for a guide, drew back his right and struck. With the striking of that blow strength seemed to flow into his muscles for an instant, a last flurry, a last grasp by an indomitable man at opportunity, and, clutching Cluny's shoulder with fingers which could not be loosed, he struck and struck again until the big man's knees buckled under him, his neck went limp, and he sagged downward to lie on his face unconscious.

Then Donovan lifted his face to the sky and breathed a deep, rending breath.

"There!" he said. "There!"

He tottered, but Nérée was by his side, her arm about his waist, supporting him. She drew his left arm about her neck and over her shoulder, and stood bravely sustaining his weight.

"I think," he said, thickly, "I should like—water."

Exerting to the utmost her young strength, she half carried, half dragged him to the steps, upon which she allowed him to slump while she ran inside for the pail of water, and gently, with tender hands and tearful eyes, she bathed his face, wet his head in the grateful coolness, gave him to drink.

"Donovan," she whispered, "I—I am to blame. I am to blame for this."

He moved his head strangely, frowning. "Nonsense!" he said, faintly but shortly. And then, "How—long did—it last?"

"I don't know."

"Is it night?"

"Night!"

"Yes. Did we fight—until dark?"

"It is bright sunlight," she said, in sudden nameless terror.

He sat a moment in silence, passing his hand before his eyes. "Daylight, eh? Bright sunlight. Then," he said, and his voice was harsh, stronger now, and dreadful in its sneering

rage and agony. "Then your God has played another practical joke."

"Donovan! Mr. Steele! What are you saying?"

"I am saying," he said, "that I am blind."

"No, no, no!" Nérée cried. "Oh no, no! Not that!"

Donovan laughed mirthlessly. "It's His best, don't you think?" he asked.

Chapter *Twenty-one*

Blind! It may be there is in the language a word of more ghastly significance. But to hear pronounced the sentence to life-long darkness; to be told, or to hear another told that never again shall he see human face, light of sun, or beauty of earth pours ice into the veins, grips the heart with cold fingers of dread, casts the mind into panic. Donovan sat grim, silent. What thoughts were his no tongue could say. He made no protest, gave no audible signal of the despair which must have clutched him. He might, like Lot's wife, have been turned to a pillar of salt—it was her punishment for looking behind her. Now he could never do aught but look behind him. His sentence was that he should remember what he *had seen.*

But Nérée cried out against the calamity. She was on her feet before him, bending over him, his face between her hands—and he suffered it without protest. Perhaps he did not know it. His eyes were open, wide open, changed in no minute detail from the eyes which had seen so keenly but an hour before. Nérée gazed into them as if she would wrench from them their secret—demanding of them the knowledge if this were blindness or but temporary derangement. She moved her hand to and fro before his face in a foolish effort to test if he could not really see, and then, with a wide maternal gesture she clasped his head in her arms and held it close to her breast. It was not an impulse of love; it was an impulse of sympathy deep as the ocean depths. This he suffered also.

"It is not true," she cried. "It is but a hurt. It will not remain. The blow—that was it. In an hour, in a day, you will see."

"I shall never see," said Donovan, in a dead flat voice. He

spoke from knowledge. He *knew.* It was just such a trick as Fate would keep in store for him—the sort of thing he expected of life.

She looked away from him, across the little plateau. Four men were lifting Cluny, preparing to carry him down the hill, and the sight recalled her to their imminent needs.

"Come," she said. "Can you walk? We must go, hurry. Cluny—they will bring him to life, and we must be gone?"

"Why?" he asked. "What matter?"

"He must not find you so." Her thought was for him alone. "Come! Oh, you must find strength to come!"

He got to his feet, and on his face was a hard, ironical half smile, a thing not good to see. This girl has demanded rescue of him, and now he, her unwilling champion, was being succored by her. Well, what matter? As well go with her as stay where he was; as well stay as go. He swayed dizzily, and she supported him.

"We must go far," she said, "and hide. He will send to find us." And so, urging, supporting, half dragging him with a strength inspired by the necessity, she got him down the hill, across the bridge, and then, with pauses and haltings, her courage, the constant reiteration of her determination, got him up the winding hill beyond and to the road which dipped and swayed and pitched on its way to St. Fidèle.

Donovan's strength and vitality were returning. He could walk now without staggering, and his head was clear, clear but for the numbing knowledge it contained. How could a man think straight from point to point when all the time a voice called harshly to him, dinning the words: "You are blind! You are blind!"

"What shall we do?" Nérée asked of him. "You must think. You must tell me what is best."

"Nothing is best," he said.

"You're a man," cried Nérée. "You've mastered the woods and the winter. You have beaten Cluny—beaten him until he lies blind and unconscious. Now you must beat yourself."

"I *was* a man," said Donovan.

"You're not a coward. A man who can fight on as you just fought on is not a coward. You *can't* give up."

"No," he said, speaking always in that flat, level voice, "I'm not a coward."

"What are you, then—if you let this—thing—destroy your will to live?"

For an instant he seemed his old self as he replied with edged irony, "What am I?" He shrugged his shoulders. "If you were a bit fanciful you might say I am God's football."

"If you won't help yourself, will you help me?"

"What are you to me?"

"Nothing—nothing," she cried. "But I am another human being, bound to this earth as you are. Is not that enough? If men and women do not help one another in need, what is to become of the world?"

"The world is a futile ball, spinning toward destruction. Let it spin."

"But," she said, taking another road, the road to his pride, "would it not be a thing to make men marvel if Le Malcœur, blind and saddled with a woman, was able to outwit Cluny?"

"I was never vain," he said.

"Then," she cried, in exasperation, "why have you done the many silly things men tell of you?"

"Eh?"

"Why have you made yourself Le Malcœur? Why have you fought and worked and posed—"

"Posed!" he said, sharply.

"Posed," she said, and let the word lie as it fell.

He made no rejoinder. It was sufficient for him to know

that he had never been a *poseur,* so what this girl chose to believe was of no consequence.

"You have boasted," she said, "that nothing and no one should prevent your doing what you wished. You have shoved men and obstacles out of your way. Nothing mattered to you but your own will and your own self. . . . Well, Mr. Steele? You cannot see. That is obstacle enough for anybody. It rather breaks down your philosophy, doesn't it? It upsets your notion of your self-sufficiency. For once you've got to consider other people. Blindness is an obstacle that even Le Malcœur cannot override."

"I didn't choose the name," he said.

"But you gloried in it. If Le Malcœur were as indomitable as he has studied to create the belief he is, he would at least fight to the end. He wouldn't lie down in a ditch, a quitter."

"You want to get away from Cluny?" he asked.

"You know it."

"Then," he said, "you'd better be about it."

"And leave you?"

"I don't want you."

"Leave you—and so confirm again your belief that everybody is treacherous and selfish? That would be a satisfaction to you, would it not? Another count in your indictment. I'm staying. If Cluny comes he shall find us both."

He slowly got to his feet, groping his way upright. "I don't want your help. I don't want your foolish pity. Don't you think I see through you and your mawkish sentimentality? Am I so dull I cannot understand you are trying to fool me into accepting your help?"

"It is your pride, then, your senseless vanity!"

"Call it what you like."

"You are afraid men will tell how Le Malcœur had need to be rescued by a girl."

"I will not mix myself up with you—with any woman."

"You *are* vain," she said. "But, after all, you *are* mixed up with me, as you put it. You seem to have some idea that women are trying to entangle you, are angling for you. Just stop a moment and ask why they should. What have you to offer a woman? What had you to offer a woman yesterday or a month ago—much less to-day? Are you so desirable? Perhaps you are rich, but I have not heard it reported. Or is it because you are handsome? Or why? And if there were reasons to angle for you yesterday, are they not gone to-day? You have intelligence, then use it. Suppose I caught you to-day—what would I do with you? . . . I have finished arguing with you. Do as you like. Help us to save ourselves, or we will sit here together and wait for what comes."

"You will have to lead me," he said, evenly, and her heart turned sick for him. "Go along this road until we are upon a ledge of rock where we make no footprints. Then tell me. We will follow the ledge back into the woods and hide until darkness."

"And then?"

"Then I shall know what to do," he said, curtly.

She took his hand, and as her warm, slender fingers clasped his he felt a sensation such as would have come from some powerful, reviving, life-giving current of force. It took him by surprise, halted him, startled him. There was pleasure in her touch, such pleasure as he had never experienced from the touch of another, and because this was so he grew angry with himself and with her. How dared she affect him so—that was the attitude of his mind—and he jerked his hand to free it; but her clasp was firm.

"Come," she said.

They plodded along the road, their progress of the slowest. Unaccustomed as he was to his new condition, he slipped,

stumbled, tripped, and more than once it was only her sustaining hand which saved him from a fall. It was humiliating. At last they reached a spot where for rods the road was floored with bare granite, and here Nérée stopped.

"The ledge runs up the mountain side," she said.

"Follow it," he ordered.

For an hour they climbed, scrambling among bowlders, zigzaging through the timber, higher and higher. More than a few times he was down and Nérée helped him to his feet. He who had been battered and bruised was battered and bruised again by rocks and trees from which neither Nérée's vigilance nor his own groping hand could save him.

"Can you see the road?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you know where the road is?"

"Between us and the river."

"So that you can find it?"

"Yes."

"Then we will rest until night. Is there a thicket of young spruce near?"

"At our right."

"We will force our way into it. Even if they scatter and search the hills, it will hide us."

In this time he spoke no word to her other than was essential to their progress; his manner was cold, forbidding; in nothing did he omit to make her aware of her lack of welcome and of the repugnance with which he regarded her presence. On her part, she labored silently, with courage and steadfastness, for the way was not easy or the demand upon her physical resources light. She conducted him into the dense mass of young spruces, and in a circumscribed opening they crouched side by side. So they sat in the silence of people who

find discomfort in each other's presence. At last Nérée spoke again.

"As soon," she said, "as you can reach a village, you are safe. But I——" she paused and bit her lip.

"But you——" he said.

"But I will be safe nowhere. You know how it is with me, M'sieu Steele. For a year I have hidden—only to be recognized by Cluny." She paused. "I am talking, not because I ask help from you, but because I am lonely and afraid, and I must talk."

"Go on," he said.

"Cluny will search for me—whether to give me up to Xavier Caron or to use me for some purpose of his own, as he hinted, I do not know; but—but—where can I hide? I am penniless. Where can I go?"

"Where would you have gone before Cluny found you?"

"I—I didn't know. . . . I was running away, anywhere. Possibly I could have reached the river and made my way to Ha! Ha! Bay or to Chicoutemi, where no one would have recognized me."

He brooded for a time, then he spoke suddenly. "Very well," he said, as if he acceded to some silent demand made upon him or recognized some necessity. "Very well."

"What?" she asked.

"It is the luck that follows me," he said, and then he turned his sightless eyes upon her and spoke hotly: "Why did I have to come back here to see you? What have you done to me? Why am I compelled to shoulder your troubles when they are nothing to me? Why cannot I get away from you—even when you are at a distance? Do you believe I *want* to think about you? Is there no way for me to get away from you—or from the lives of people? I tell you I don't want to be near you.

I came to prove to myself that I could see you and go away, never to see you again."

"Yes," she said, softly.

"And now I shall do it. I've got you on my hands, and I shall rid myself of you. That is the only way. Until you are safe I can't avoid you. There is a fate in it."

"When," she asked, quietly, "shall I be safe? Is it when I find another place where I can hide for a while? No, M'sieu Steele, I shall not be safe then. I can never be safe until it is proven I did not kill my brother—and that Xavier Caron did plot to poison him and put the guilt upon me."

"With that I have no concern," he said.

"Yet," she said, "you know I am not guilty."

"I know nothing," he said, "and care less."

"Then," she asked, curiously, "this malign fate which throws us together will cease to operate when you have found another hiding place for me?"

"Yes," he said, "for I shall go so far away that nothing can draw us together again."

"I wonder," she said under her breath.

"What did you say?"

"Where," she asked, "do you think I can hide?"

"I have found a place," he said.

"A place where I will be taken in and my secret guarded?"

"Where you will be safe as you were with Odilon Turcot."

"You seem certain of it."

"I am certain," he said, and there was perfect belief in his voice.

"For one who distrusts all men, this is a strange matter," she said. "Is there, then, one you find worthy of trust?"

This smote him with the impact of a blow. Was there one man he trusted? It must be so. It must be that, stealthily, another human being had stolen into his confidence; that again

he had given trust and belief—though he had not realized it until he spoke. . . . And yet it was true. Even now, as he considered a fact so repugnant to him and so alarming, he was compelled to admit its truth. There was one man in whom he rested a confidence which was implicit. He was compelled to do so. The life and the acts of that man forced him, and most of all that one great act which he had witnessed with his own eyes and comprehended with his own brain demanded belief and trust of him. The man was Leandre Savard.

Nérée watched his face as these reflections passed through his mind, saw how it worked with emotions, how it lightened and grew darker, and settled at last into the bleakness which had become its habit.

"There is such a man," he admitted, reluctantly.

"We can reach him?"

"His little farm is in Grand Fond—the place where he is to be found. His name is Leandre Savard."

"Your dog!" she exclaimed.

"Those who give names," he said, "do not always choose well. Leandre is no man's dog. When it is dark we will start. I will leave you there in his care."

"And then?"

"I shall go away again."

"But who," she asked, "will lead you?"

For the second time in an hour a question of hers fell upon him like a blow. He had forgotten his eyes—that they could not see. Who, indeed, would lead him? Where could he go? How could he proceed in his blindness? He threw back his shoulders and lifted his head—and in that moment Nérée's heart went out to him in pride of his blind courage.

"I can find my way," he said, harshly.

Chapter *Twenty-two*

Leandre Savard occupied his little bit of land, which he hoped to watch in its growth into a farm of dimensions. His attitude toward it was that of a father toward a child—a father who regards fondly each pair of outgrown breeches as a sign that his boy is just so much nearer to the desired manhood. He had bought the plot on Monday, having spent the Sunday in patience upon the porch of Odilie Boucher's home, waiting for Odilie to appear. But Odilie kept to her room, weeping, her beads in her hand.

"Say to her," said Leandre, gently, "that I have stationed myself here. *Oui. Oui.* Say to her that she is my wife and I wait for her."

"She will not descend," said her father.

"She will descend some day," said Leandre, "and so I shall wait. Tell her I am a man of great patience. Also it might be you would say that I wait with a great love for her."

"She says," reported Cyrille Boucher, "that it would be a sin—and she has sinned enough."

"Say to her," said Leandre, "that even the blessed saints have sinned—but afterward the good God has forgiven the sin and made them great in heaven. What, after all, is a sin, Cyrille Boucher, but a thing to be forgiven?"

"I do not know," said the troubled father, "but it is my belief that she will die."

"I will not let her die," said Leandre simply.

And so that day passed, and in the morning Leandre was gone, but he returned before nightfall.

"Cyrille Boucher," he said, "say to my Odilie that the little home awaits. I have this day purchased a bit of land—

oh, so tiny a bit—but with a roof upon it and such furnishings as are needful in the beginning."

"Do you think, Leandre Savard," said Madame Boucher, tearfully, "that our Odilie can go to any man in marriage. At the thought of the touch or the caress of a man she would die of shame."

"My touch would be gentle and my caress would be good," said Leandre. "Say to her that she shall marry me and that I shall show no impatience. It shall be as she desires—even if I never have a wife in truth, or a child, which every man desires. I am not afraid."

"She begs," reported Cyrille, "that you will go away and not trouble her any more."

Presently, after deep thought, Leandre did go away—to the house of the *curé,* to whom he told all that was to be told and begged for help in the matter. The *curé* listened and saw the fineness and the simplicity of Leandre's heart, and put on his broad hat and trailed his black hem through the mud of the roads to the Boucher home. There he compelled them to admit him to Odilie's room and he spoke to her with the authority of one who knows the answer to the problem.

"My child," he said, "it is to be seen that you have repented. That is well."

Her only answer was a dry sob.

"You are not evil, my child, as your repentance shows." He paused and considered. "There was a woman," he said, "who washed the feet of the blessed Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair. She was a wicked woman, my child, living in open sin. You have heard how men would have sent her away from Him—but He suffered her tears and her touch. Is it not so? And is she not now among the great in Heaven? Your sin, my child, is not one-tenth so great as hers—and yet you think it cannot be forgiven. That is a new sin, and,

besides, a great foolishness. Do you love this young man?" He asked the question with sudden severity.

"So that my heart breaks," said Odilie.

"Am I the *curé* of this parish? Am I to be obeyed?"

"Yes, my father."

"Then dry your eyes, my child, and come down with me, and I will marry you to this Leandre Savard, who is a young man any girl may take pride to marry . . . and you will go to the home he has found for you, and you will forget, because God has forgotten, and, what is near to a miracle, the young man has forgotten. My order to you is to marry Leandre Savard and be happy."

And so, invoking the authority of the Church on his behalf, Leandre had his way, and was married to Odilie and took her to the little plot of ground which was not of sufficient size to be called a farm. And of these matters he sent detailed word to Donovan Steele at the hotel in La Malbaie.

It was to Leandre's little house that Donovan Steele and Nérée came after two days of hiding in the woods and two nights of painful, groping travel. Hunger had been with them, and fatigue, but always the girl had compelled the man onward, his hand in hers for guidance; and now in the morning they came to Leandre's gate and Donovan called.

"Leandre—Leandre Savard."

Leandre came running from the little shed in the rear where the cow was being milked, and he shouted with pleasure.

"M'sieu! It is m'sieu, come to see me!" He did not wait for other greeting, so high was his excitement and pleasure, but commenced to shout. "Odilie! My Odilie! Come! Come here! *He* has come! It is m'sieu with whom I saw the world!" And then he paused as his eyes of friendship saw Donovan's face. "My friend!" he exclaimed, rushing forward. "What is it? What thing has happened?"

"He is blind," said Odilie, "and he is hungry. May I bring him in?"

"*Mon dieu! C'est terrible!* May you lead him in! Ah! It is that I shall carry him in in my arms. *Oui.* Behold, is he not my friend? . . . Odilie—make haste, Odilie, with food. My friend is hungry."

And so they were welcomed, and as they satisfied their hunger Donovan stated his errand.

"I have come to you, Leandre, because I must," he said. "To ask you to take this woman into your home. She has need to be hidden—"

"I am Nérée Caron," she said, simply. It was her feeling that if she were to be received, the truth must be known, so that nothing should be done with closed eyes.

"It is no matter," said Leandre, "if m'sieu desires it. Is it not so, my Odilie?"

"What my husband desires," said Odilie, softly, "that is the law of this house."

"But," insisted Nérée, "I must tell you the truth. Perhaps you do not know my name—what they say I have done."

"We know your name," said Leandre, and then, "but it is a simple matter to see that they lied."

Donovan turned his sightless eyes quickly toward Leandre's voice, but maintained silence.

"And knowing this, you will take me into your house?"

"My Odilie shall answer," said Leandre.

"To what we have mam'selle is welcome," said Odilie, and added, "not only for the sake of my husband's friend, whom he loves, but for your own sake—now that we have seen you. Ah, mam'selle, it was evil to say such things of you—evil, and the good God will punish them."

"How do you know they were not true?" Nérée asked, curiously.

"First," said Odilie gravely, "because my husband says it, and then because your face says it also."

"Then," said Donovan, "I will leave her. Here is money—what I have. It will go far with economy."

"But, m'sieu, what do you yourself do?"

"I go away, Leandre."

"To what place?"

"I do not know."

"To do what thing?"

"I do not know."

"To what friends, m'sieu?"

"I have no friends."

Leandre smiled. "If you have no friends, how came you to the door of Leandre Savard. *Nom d'un chien,* but this is the proud day for Leandre. It is the day m'sieu intrusts his friend with something the most precious to him."

"With what?" said Donovan, not comprehending.

"With the woman of m'sieu's heart," said Leandre.

"No," said Donovan, furiously. "It is not so. I bring her here to be rid of her—that is all."

"Of a certainty," said Leandre, smiling across at Odilie. "It is easy to be seen. But, to repeat: "m'sieu goes away, he knows not where or to whom. And m'sieu is blind. Ah, there now is a great misfortune. How befell this blindness?"

Then Nérée told the story, while Donovan sat in grim, forbidding silence, and Leandre and Odilie listened with breathlessness to the end. Leandre's face was shining.

"And now," he said, "I know m'sieu is my friend. Those blows upon the head of Cluny—many of them were struck for me. Ah, I know it is true. For you he fought, mam'selle, but also for me . . . and now, being blind and so helpless, he would run away from the home of his friend, which is his home. . . . Have you heard him say it, my Odilie?"

"I have heard," she said.

"And what shall we do, my wife?"

"We shall make him to remain," she said.

"*Vraiment.* And by force if the need be. From here you shall not stir. Here is your home. Here will we care for you. Ah, this blindness—it is but for a time. It will pass. Myself, I shall run to La Malbaie for the doctor. Among the great ones at Pointe au Pic there will be a famous *medicin* from Montreal, or even from the city of New York. Who knows? And I shall fetch him."

"I go," said Donovan.

"For this one time," said Leandre, "I must set myself in opposition to m'sieu. As matters stand, unless there is one to guide, how can you go? Can one without the sight of his eyes find his way through the woods? I ask of you. And none shall guide you from this house."

Donovan did not reply. For moments he sat in bleak silence, and the hearts of the three who watched his grim agony suffered—but not as he suffered, not as he, who had wrung from a vast continent its respect for his manhood, its fear of his strength, suffered in the realization of his helplessness, of his dependence. He who had lived to free himself from all dependence, was now more dependent than any. He could not move, eat, go to bed, arise in the morning without aid! A saturnine world had known what prank to play. It seemed to him that he had never known how to hate the world and to despise the Being who was its creator, and who so conducted it that He might take His pleasure from its agonies.

At last he spoke. "Then," he said, "I must remain." That was all. There were no vain protests, no display of the terror of darkness which must have sat upon him. Cold and calm he was, and hard.

Then began those interminable, sickeningly monotonous

days, days which Donovan distinguished from nights only because of the movement and voices he heard about him. His occupation was to sit, and the labor of his mind was to rid itself of thought and to become vacuous. Hour after hour, day after day, he sat immobile, his face set and bleak, his sightless eyes staring rigidly at nothing. There was, withal, a certain dignity about him, a harsh, forbidding dignity. He was never querulous, never made demands, never asked for any assistance, no matter how slight. Always he waited for some one to think of his needs and to do what must be done. He sat, a prisoner of darkness, and he did not cringe. It was not precisely that he was defiant, nor was he in the least resigned, but there was courage in him and the courage reflected in his bearing. It was, so Nérée thought, as if he were a victim who would not give his enemy the delight of seeing him cringe—but the further thought that his enemy, toward whom he turned his inscrutable, emotionless face, was the God whom she worshiped, terrified her, filled her soul with dread.

His life, who had been so active, was now the simple business which went on about him, and to it he listened when he could not blank his mind. He listened to the talk of Leandre and Odilie, of Nérée and Leandre, and he studied and scrutinized their talk. And, what troubled him more than aught else but the fact of his blindness, was how they waited upon him, gave their time and their thought to his comfort—how the life of the little house revolved about him and was regulated for him. This was not as it should be in the world He had created. Gentleness and self-sacrifice and constant solicitude had no place in a world of treachery and harshness and selfish malignity. He pondered it with distaste.

Then there was the day when Leandre beguiled a physician from the Manoir Richlieu at Pointe au Pic to examine Donovan's eyes. The doctor came, made his tests, and went away

again—but left nothing behind him which had not been certainty to Donovan before. The doctor's word was that Donovan Steele was blind, hopelessly, irrevocably blind. Donovan had shrugged his shoulders at the announcement.

"You didn't think He would bother with half a joke," he said, bitterly.

They—his three companions—left him as little alone as was possible. Through the day they took turns sitting by his side, or walking with him about the yard or up and down the road, now dry and dusty with the sun of approaching summer. He resented their solicitude inwardly, but submitted silently. Leandre sang to him and talked with forced gayety of their exploits in the vanished year; Odilie spoke softly with him in her grave way, a still, timorous way which was gradually, day by day, giving away to an incredulous happiness. He perceived a change in the girl, how the burden was lifting from her, how she was responding to the love and gentleness and the wonderful simplicity of her husband. Somehow he resented Odilie's presence less than that of the others, and endured her praises of Leandre and the goodness of Leandre's heart with less of scoffing than was his answer to the others.

Nérée he resented most of all. In the beginning he would not tolerate her presence; made it apparent to her in his chill, always courteous and self-contained manner, that he would have none of her. But even there he changed a little, changed, so it seemed, through curiosity. It was apparent that he studied her as a scientist would study some unpleasant specimen. As for Nérée, she was always patient, always ready to give him her hand or to beguile his time with reading or with talking.

It was Leandre who made him a cane, and all three who taught him by heart the slopes and turns of the yard, patient, solicitous—concealing the sympathy which he ever resented—

until he could walk about the circumscribed space alone. And it was Leandre who, daring Donovan's bitter irony, insisted upon a hope.

"We shall see," he said. "Ah, m'sieu, you say it is the good God who has made this blindness. It is not so, m'sieu. It was a stick of wood in the hand of this Cluny. That is a different matter altogether. It is foolish to think otherwise. Think you God would use a man like Cluny? Puof! He would not so soil His hands."

"Soil His hands," Donovan said, scornfully.

"*Oui,* m'sieu, and the good God and the blessed Jesus must weep to see such a man as you—such a man!—smitten with blindness. And so, m'sieu, it is my belief that one day you will see."

"And how will this come about?" Donovan asked, with heavy sarcasm.

"You will permit us to take you to the good Ste. Anne. That is it. We shall make a pilgrimage, m'sieu, and the good devotion, and all together we shall beg the favor of the saint. Ah, she is kind—and she will make a miracle."

"You believe that fraud?" Donovan asked, harshly.

It must not be thought these days were without their

"I *know,*" said Leandre, "and so it is no fraud. And Mam'selle Nérée, who is much wiser than I, and educated past all believing—she knows also."

"She knows also, does she? And how will this miracle be brought about? Am I to pray?" He laughed. "Can you see me praying, Leandre? And to what good? Have I faith in your sainte or in your God? Would they answer a prayer when they knew the man who prayed believed he was praying to a fraud?"

"*Non,* m'sieu, it would not be so. But see, the good sainte

makes to cure those who are insane. Can they themselves pray or have faith? Not so. They are cured, as I have seen, but through the faith and devotion of those who accompany."

"Vicarious, eh?" asked Donovan.

"It may be, m'sieu. That is a word of education and I am an ignorant man."

"Well," said Donovan, "if I am ever to see but by this Ste. Anne hocus-pocus, Leandre, you may depend upon it I shall remain blind."

It must not be thought these days were without their dangers and their apprehensions. Not so, for it was not to be credited that Cluny would fail to make careful search for Nérée. Also there was uncertainty as to what he would do with his knowledge of her existence. Over Leandre's home rested always the shadow of danger and the atmosphere of a hiding place. Nérée was as much a prisoner as Donovan, afraid to show herself to any, hiding in the house when neighbors passed or stopped; and all were at constant, watchful pains to conceal that she was an occupant of the little house. It was a strain and an anxiety. Upon her happiness rested the cloud of a dark, uncertain future. What could be the end for her? What the final outcome of her unendurable position. Yet, however greatly this troubled her, she kept the secret to herself, and for her goodness and sweetness and cheerfulness, and for her gayety and the genius for making others gay which resided in her, Leandre and Odilie came to love her as if she were their sister or their child. As for Donovan, he studied her, studied her, compiling his data and co-ordinating them—filing them away unwillingly with other data, such as the fidelity and simple nobility of Leandre and the gratitude and humility of Odilie; and there were hours when he felt at a loss, groping, shaken. Events and human

actions and the constant rubbing of human character wore at the thing which confined his soul. Scoff as he would, rail as he would, facts were driving him, pulling and hauling him. He did not know it, but he was fighting savagely against the resistless current of truth.

Chapter *Twenty-three*

It cannot be said too frequently that Cluny was a patient man. Also he possesses a devious brain which seemed to shoot off tentacles capable of feeling about stealthily and of reaching into dark corners to which the ordinary thought could not penetrate. And, in spite of his bulk, there was a certain softness of tread and a stealthiness about him which had a way of astonishing its victims by the unexpectedness of his results. Now every man, no matter what may be his vices and in spite of the most Herculean efforts to be totally evil, cannot escape the curse of certain virtues. They may be negative or they may be positive. Cluny had those of each variety, but among the negatives was a total absence of vindictiveness. It may seem strange, but the fact was that he held no rancor against Donovan Steele, but rather admiration of a sort. For the thrashing Donovan had given him he plotted no revenge. In the way of business he would have met Donovan the following day with that hearty good-nature and human companionability of his; or, had he encountered Donovan blind and wandering upon the road he would undoubtedly have given him guidance, shelter, and advice. In his incomprehensible way Cluny was a sportsman.

However, it is his quality of infinite patience which is of present importance—taken in team with those deviously wriggling tentacles of his astute brain. These qualities he had set upon the task of assuring himself of the truth which lay hidden under the murder of Nérée Caron's brother. He had made his beginning before the day of that great fight with Donovan Steele, and in the days of recuperation which fol-

lowed it be took certain strides along the road toward a sure destination.

In the beginning, when the matter was of interest to him only as a piece of news, he had reached the conclusion that Nérée Caron was innocent or imbecile. Having seen and appreciated her, he discarded the second possibility, and, lying on his bed with closed, swollen eyes, he argued the matter for the defense. Facts he must have, and certain facts were already his—but in those days of inactivity he compelled his reason to inform him where other facts lay to be unearthed, and what they would signify.

For instance, he gave much consideration to the night of the murder and to the facts which surrounded it—to the theater, which he had visited and studied carefully, to the program of the performance, which he possessed, and to the significance of these. It would be possible, he was certain, to account for every second of Nérée's time on that day and night—particularly that night. The program informed him that she had been upon the stage during the greater part of the evening. Undoubtedly some stage manager or other could give him exactly the minutes she had spent in entertaining the audience, as, for example, that she had gone upon the stage at—shall we say?—eight-thirty by the clock, and had there remained until eight-forty-one, and the like. The interstices between these public appearances could be filled by members of the company. It could be determined if she had left the theater even for a moment, if she had telephoned, sent a messenger, spoken with anyone outside of the cast. It could be settled if she had had *opportunity*. It should be possible to find more about how and when the Caron boy entered the theater—and then there was the box of candy. It was clear to Cluny that Nérée had been unaware that any box of candy occupied her dressing table, as it was clear to

him that the boy knew he would find one there. Whoever sent the boy to the dressing room did not do so in a haphazard manner, hoping he would stumble upon the poisoned *bonbons*. He had been *told* to look for them! It was also evident to Cluny that no inquiries had been made as to how the candy came in its place. That, to the police, had been a patent thing—Nérée Caron had placed it there. But Nérée had *not* placed it there and some other individual had. That individual must have left some trace, some recollection in somebody's mind, of his presence.

From the moment Nérée left Montreal with the company of amateur players some one must have been with her. She was too popular, too conspicuous, to have been left alone. Her friends would remember. The facts of the journey, and the facts of the half day after their arrival in Quebec, would be printed upon their minds. The dreadful ending of the day would see to that. And the telegram? That would have been done cleverly—that telegram to young Caron to meet his sister in Quebec. Undoubtedly the boy had never received it, for it had not been meant for him, but for damning evidence. If it had been done cleverly, then equal cleverness should be able to penetrate to the secret of the doing of it.

Quebec, the theater, the hotel, all should be full of facts ready to be mined out, ready for the gold of truth to be stamped from the ore. And Montreal! Cluny already had been in Montreal and was satisfied with his journey.

Cluny was not a man to let his plans be set awry by mishap or even disaster. Nothing was changed. True, Nérée Caron had escaped him and was in safe hiding, but that did not matter. So long as he knew that she was alive, that would answer. He could find her. What he needed now were facts. When he had them, circumstances would teach him how to conduct; he would, when the moment came, know whether

his profit lay in betraying Nérée to Xavier or in exposing Xavier and making his trade with Nérée. He would like to have Nérée herself—naturally. If he could take her and her fortune and become the head of the Caron family, that would be well; there was something about this which appealed to him, for he would then step into a ready-made position in life, become a figure—and he was not without his vanity. Well, that was possible. With the facts in his hand he could go to Nérée and prove to her that he could extricate her from her terrible position—for a consideration. The consideration would be herself. Or he could approach Xavier in the way of wholesale blackmail. Either way he might get Nérée for himself.

So, while he was recovering, he caused search to be made for her, and when he was recovered he gave his own talents to the hunt. It ought, so it seemed, to be an easy matter to trace the movements of a girl and a man sorely battered as he knew Donovan had been. But from the moment they left the plateau together there could be found no human being who had seen them. They had vanished as if the mantle of invisibility had been given to them.

In addition to this he spent as much of his time as could be spared from St. Fidèle in Quebec and in Montreal—and he got results.

A month, two months, were thus consumed, as, minute item by minute item, he pieced together the puzzle picture of the tragedy and held the truth in his powerful fingers. If he could have found Nérée he would have been content; the moment would have arrived for him to act, to realize on his speculation. But Nérée was not and Donovan Steele was not, which facts, taken in conjunction, were disquieting, for Cluny did not in any degree underestimate Donovan as an antagonist. And if the natural, the to-be-expected thing occurred, Donovan Steele

would have fallen in love with Nérée and Nérée with him. So reasoned Cluny, and this was a complication which might be of first importance. Donovan Steele was a man to fight for the woman he loved.

It was strange in all this that Cluny did not rate Xavier Caron as an adversary at all, but merely as a victim. Even the most astute of men know these lapses, and it is due to them, perhaps, that the astute do not inherit the earth. Four-fifths of the world owes its opportunities to the lapses of the knowing ones, and the commonplace man makes a living because he is commonplace and hence dependable. Your keen man is like a canoe; your studgy man like a rowboat. You can go faster and farther in a canoe, but not so safely. Nobody ever shoots rapids in a scow, but every piece of white water is an invitation to a canoe. No, Cluny did not set Xavier down in red ink on his ledger, which was a grievous error of bookkeeping. No man able to accomplish the deadly thing Xavier had brought about, to conceal it as he had concealed it, is to be wholly disregarded. Also such a man must, day and night, be on his guard and apprehensive. He is sensitive to the threat of danger, acutely sensitive. He is ever watching, listening, finding opportunities to observe, yet to remain unobserved. His eyes are ever on his own trail. Therefore it is no more than should have been expected that Xavier became aware of Cluny's interest in the tragedy—in spite of Cluny's cunning and stealth—and instituted measures to protect himself should Cluny's nosing about verge upon the perilous to him.

Xavier waited, and what dark thoughts occupied his mind, who shall say? The mind of an Xavier Caron is not to be fathomed nor comprehended by the normal human being who does not covet his neighbor's goods to the extremity of murder, or who, without remorse, is capable of administering poison to a child. Yet there are men of that sort—and women. There

are creatures who masquerade the earth in a guise of human beings to whom the killing of another is a luxury; in their murky, abhorrent way they may regard murder as a virtue, an achievement. Who can say? Beings are born wholly malignant. If a child may be born without a tongue or without the sight of his eyes, may not one be born without a conscience? Or without a soul? Or is it the disease we have learned to call by the name of insanity?

At last, in the closing days of June, Cluny came again to Montreal—and he had become dangerous! Xavier knew to a hair how dangerous he had become, or fancied he did, and patently by chance he encountered Cluny in the lobby of Cluny's hotel. They shook hands, which was rather a mockery on the part of both of them, and dined together over a bottle of wine. It was not until the meal was ended that Xavier made a suggestion, which was that they find a spot to which they might retire and converse in privacy.

"I got a room, and the's two chairs," said Cluny.

"That will do very well, my friend," Xavier said, in that fine, cultivated voice of his. "That will do very well, indeed—if I do not trespass upon your time."

"I got the evening free," said Cluny, "and, anyhow, I'm a man that's always willin' to listen to a business proposition. Our last deal together come out well?"

"It did," said Xavier, "thanks to your efficiency."

The elevator carried them to the fourth floor, where they alighted and walked side by side to Cluny's door. It might have been a valuable hint to Cluny as to his future conduct had he seen the expression in Xavier's eyes when Cluny turned his back and bent to unlock the door. It was a caressing expression, and it rested upon Cluny's back, centering on a spot just over the heart. Almost it was the look to be seen in the eyes of a dipsomaniac, long deprived of liquor, when

the bottle is set before him. . . . They entered and were seated.

"You have been the target for gossip, my friend," Xavier said, genially. "In La Malbaie, where I spent the week, your name is on every lip—yours and that of the young man they call Le Malcœur. Ah, M'sieu Cluny, you have a playful way with the other sex."

This was a form of badinage to which Cluny was unaccustomed and against which he had no defense, a fact well appreciated by Xavier Caron. He spoke, not from the desire to make light conversation, but from intention. If the mind of Cluny could be agitated in any degree he would be, by so much, weakened as an adversary.

"Folks gabble," said Cluny, shortly.

"Who was the girl you fought over—ah, and at the age of discretion you have reached? Now if it had been money or a matter of honor—but a girl! The queer thing is, my friend, that La Malbaie, which seems omniscient, asks the identity of the woman. A mystery, eh? And this Le Malcœur snatched her and vanished! Romance, is it not? A story. Now if you are in confidential mood—"

"I'm not," said Cluny, but nevertheless his eyes twinkled with sly humor as he thought how great would be the astonishment of this man if the girl's identity should be disclosed.

"A man," observed Xavier, "who can beat M'sieu Cluny into unconsciousness must indeed be a man."

"You can bet your bottom dollar on that," Cluny said. "He is."

"And she was beautiful, eh? It is said you have a discerning taste."

"Is this here what you wanted to talk to me about?" Cluny asked, shortly.

"Indeed no! Far, far from it. It was quite another matter

I had in mind, but my interest was aroused. As whose interest would not be? Especially a man whose life has not been destitute of successes. Women, women! It is the truth, M'sieu Cluny, that we cannot do without them even in their absence. We must talk of them."

"I thought," Cluny said, and his tone verged upon a sneer, "that you gentlemen made it a rule not to bandy about a woman's name."

"Ah, bandy about! True! True! We mention them only with chivalrous respect, with admiration for their beauty and their virtue. What an imponderable thing is this virtue we value so highly! What is it? A word. But what a thing a word may be! Now which do you suppose, m'sieu, invented this word, a man or a woman?"

"I ain't never give thought to such matters."

"You should. By all means you should! It is my belief that the word and the attribute it stands as the symbol for were the invention of men. Man invented virtue out of his selfishness, and women, not being without their high moments of ability, invented marriage as the answer to it. Ever since women have been trying to escape from this prison of virtue and men have been filing at the chains of marriage. Not, I would point out, without signal successes on both sides."

"Huh!" grunted Cluny.

"Not that women haven't made more of the matter than men. Using their brains, they have turned what was meant to be an imposition upon them into a commodity. Very neat, eh? And set a high price upon it. On the whole, I think they have the better of the transaction, though it is their way to complain. Tell me, M'sieu Cluny, you have had much experience of the world, do you think there exists such a thing as abstract right and abstract wrong?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"Why, this: Is any act right inherently or wrong inherently? Or have they been made right or wrong by law or agreement or common consent? Now I wonder. If you have a coat and I steal that coat from you, have I committed an act that is wicked—or have I merely broken a law invented by man for the protection of his property? If I take another's wife, and she permits herself to be taken, have we committed what, for lack of a more accurately descriptive name, we call a sin, or have we merely been guilty of doing an act which runs counter to the expediency of the race?"

"Moses fetched down the Ten Commandments from a mount," said Cluny—speaking out of the education of his youth.

"Ah yes. But where did Moses get the Ten Commandments?"

"God gave them to him," said Cluny.

"So it is said, and admitting it, did God tell Moses, or did Moses tell the Children of Israel, that these Commandments constituted a statement of what was morally—in the abstract sense, you understand—right and wrong? Now that is a matter I have puzzled over. Or were they simply a set of rules to help a barbaric agglomeration of tribes to live together in a certain degree of peace and without tearing forever at one another's throats. Expediency again, M'sieu Cluny. Personally I incline to that side of the argument. By the way, m'sieu, do you credit the existence of a Deity?"

"Do I believe the's a God?"

"Precisely."

"Sure," said Cluny.

"And a heaven, and a hell?"

"Sure."

"It must be a comfort," said Xavier, in that way of his, "a great comfort; more particularly the certainty of a hell."

"Say," demanded Cluny, "was it to talk religion—"

"Not religion, either," said Xavier. "I merely followed the line of my thoughts. In pleasant company a man's mind will wander."

"Well," said Cluny, "suppose we quit wanderin' and get down to business."

"Gladly," said Xavier, and then with a curious hardening of his voice and an abruptness which was almost harshness he asked, "What do you think you're going to gain by it, Cluny?"

"By what?" Cluny asked, nonplused and at a loss for Xavier's meaning.

"By intruding," said Xavier, "into matters which do not concern you."

"Such as?" Cluny asked, truculently.

"The unfortunate death of my nephew," said Xavier.

The unexpectedness of attack from this quarter threw Cluny into momentary confusion. Here was an unforeseen thing, a contingency not provided for. But he was not a man long to remain at a loss. In the instant of silence he gripped himself firmly and was ready for whatever might come.

"Where'd you git that idea?" he asked.

"I haven't gotten any idea—I *know*," said Xavier.

Cluny was silent, expectant.

"I know," said Xavier, coldly, "whom you have seen, whom you have questioned, where you have intruded—and now I should like to know what is your intention?"

"You know all that, eh? In which case you know what I've found out."

"I have no idea what you *think* you've found out."

"I don't think," said Cluny, mimicking Xavier's sentence of a moment before. "I know."

"Indeed! And what do you know?"

"Well," said Cluny, "this comes before I expected, but I was bound to have it out with you sometime—and it might's well be now. I found out in the first place that Nérée Caron didn't have anything to do with the killin' of her brother. She *couldn't* have had. And if, takin' all the circumstances together, she could possibly 'a' done it, she *didn't*."

"Go on," said Xavier.

"And," said Cluny, "I found out you *did*."

"Ah!" said Xavier.

"I don't mean just findin' it out. The's lots of things a body knows and can't prove. But here's a thing I know, and I can prove it."

"And do you propose *to* prove it?" Xavier asked. His voice was gentle again, refined, cultured, courteous. But his eyes were cold—cold and bleak and dangerous.

"That," said Cluny, "remains to be seen."

"The idea being, of course, to enrich yourself at my expense?"

"At somebody's," said Cluny, and Xavier's eyes narrowed.

"Somebody's," he said, softly.

"Why, yes," said Cluny. "I notice you don't deny the fact."

Xavier shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I waste words?" he asked. "You know, I know you know, and you know I know you know. We have progressed beyond denials."

"Glad you feel that way," said Cluny.

"What I've been pondering," said Xavier, "is what set you on. It was something, of course, that made it appear to you a good transaction. I wonder. Why, M'sieu Cluny, so far as I can reason the matter out, there is just one thing

which would have set you to nosing about and prodding under the rubbish."

"Yes? And what's that?"

"Nérée Caron," said Xavier. "You've found her. My niece is alive."

This was unlooked for. Cluny accused himself in this moment for underestimating Xavier Caron, but it was too late for regrets. He must play the game as the pieces were set upon the board.

"You guessed it," said he, with a shrug.

"It was not a guess. That *had* to be it. And now you propose to dicker, I suppose. To find whether you can get more out of me than you can from my niece."

"I'm lookin' for the best deal," said Cluny.

"I'll help you decide," Xavier said, in much the tone he would have used to a young man seeking his advice upon a subject of small moment, "and give you reasons. Of course you can do better by coming to me. My niece would have to pay you nothing, and gratitude is a slender line with which to hold a big fish. No, Cluny, the only way you could do your abilities justice, if you were to take the side of Nérée Caron, would be to become her husband and so take all the properties. There is no other way, and that, unfortunately for you, is scarcely practicable."

"I ain't so sure."

"That is because you have had limited opportunities to meet women of Nérée Caron's class and kind. Besides which, I point out to you, she is of the Caron blood—and that is something. No, my friend, it is not practicable, because she would not marry you to save her life or to prove her innocence, which would be a greater consideration to her. Oh no, you do not know such women, M'sieu Cluny. Far from it. They do not suffer defilement to save themselves. It might

be she would marry you to save another she loved, but not to save herself. That is their nature. You may put an end to any hopes of that nature. Which leaves myself. I think you and I shall have to become partners."

Cluny regarded Xavier Caron curiously. The man had spoken proudly, confidently. He had given high praise to his niece—had not wavered for an instant in his belief in the loftiness of her soul, and Cluny wondered at the strange manifestation.

"A body'd think you admired the girl," he said.

"I do admire her," said Xavier, "and what is rather more, I am filled with respect for her. Nérée Caron is that rather rare—but, perhaps not so rare as we suppose—being, a good woman. I was near to saying that she is a great woman. But for her youth, I would say it."

"I'm damned!" said Cluny.

Xavier lifted his shoulders. "Now we are as one," he said, "and only the details remain. There are obstacles. If Nérée lives, it will be difficult to prove her dead—and we have not yet possession of the property. There is that to consider. . . . By the way, where is she?"

"I don't know," said Cluny.

"That," said Xavier, "bears on its face the marks of a certain reservation on your part—a holding back from full and co-operating partnership."

"Which is a long way to say I'm lying. I'm not. It's the bare truth. I had her, but she got away."

"Got away!" said Xavier, elevating his eyebrows, and then he nodded and smiled. "I see. I should have seen before, but with the years I grow slow of wit. The mysterious girl, of course! The girl who disappeared with this Le Malcœur."

"She's the one," said Cluny.

"Which is a complication. And does this Le Malcœur know who she is?"

"How could he?" Cluny asked.

"True, how could he? Which does not answer the question, Does he?"

"No," said Cluny.

"If," said Xavier, "I were a man given to the wasteful practices of youth I would make you a bet, M'sieu Cluny—a substantial bet—that he does."

"She'd never tell him," Cluny argued.

"It may be," observed Xavier, "that she trusts him. Such things happen in this queer world. And, as a corollary, there are persons who would be worthy of such a trust. But you do not enjoy moralizing. . . . Um. They ought not to be difficult to find—a man like this Le Malcœur and a woman such as my niece. They would be conspicuous in any company. We shall find them."

"And then?"

"Why, then," said Xavier, "we shall arrange things so there can be no anxiety overhanging our enjoyment of the Caron fortune. . . . So be about it, M'sieu Cluny. Find them. We are partners now and dependent upon each other. We are, alas! compelled to trust each other. It is a hazard, but must be suffered. I think the sooner you begin the search the better it will be."

"Do you think I've been sittin' still?"

"No, but your activities from to-day will be such as to make the former ones resemble immobility," said Xavier. He got to his feet and extended his hand, which, for an instant, Cluny hesitated to take, not from compunction, not from repulsion, but rather from a vague uneasiness which had possessed itself of him. "Good evening, M'sieu Cluny. Let us

each report progress to the other—er—with strict regard for, shall we say, accuracy. . . . Good evening."

"'Night," said Cluny.

As he sat eyeing the closed door behind which his companion disappeared he thought many things, realized many things, reached a certainty of knowledge concerning others; but there was one fact which he did not know,—a fact of importance to him,—and that was that he sat under sentence of death. Xavier Caron had tried the man Cluny in his own peculiar court and found him worthy of death.

Chapter *Twenty-four*

To Nérée Caron those days and weeks in the little home of Leandre Savard were sweet and restful, filled with the soft delights which come from close and constant association with simplicity of heart and willing self-sacrifice. True, they were tinged with melancholy—but not by reason of her own troubles. To see Donovan Steele, so strong, so handsome, such a man, and to know that never again would he look upon the beauties of the world—to reflect that his strength and manhood could never again play a part in the world's activities—caused her to grieve. So that she was very tender with him, thoughtful of his requirements, solicitous for his comfort and tolerant of his faults. For herself, she seemed to have reached a new height. She who had stood so little in need of it seemed to have been purified, uplifted until self was quite removed from her thoughts; until, without effort, she lived and dreamed and prayed for those about her. Fear was quite gone, and with it any lingering shadow of bitterness over the scurvy treatment she had had at the hands of fate. She was able to abolish the future and to live for the day, polishing the hour facets of each succeeding day until in the week there stood seven jewels. She worked. Leandre and Odilie remonstrated with her, but she only laughed at them and took delight in her labor of spinning and weaving and cooking and housekeeping. They were happy weeks.

As for Leandre, he, too, was happy, and he dealt with his Odilie as he would have dealt with the Madonna had she miraculously come to live under his roof for a time. He worshiped her, elevated her in his thoughts, served her with hand and heart—and waited with a patience which was itself

a miracle for her scars to whiten and disappear, for happiness to come again to reside with her. It was his joy to watch her day by day, and to assure himself that on Tuesday she smiled more times than on Monday. He was making her forget, proving to her that she had forgotten, making it apparent to her sensitive perceptions that to his mind she was the purest of women, washed clean of stain by her repentance and his love. All of which, knowing the story from Odilie's lips, Nérée Caron watched, watched with wonder to perceive how fine a creature God had fashioned in Leandre Savard . . . and prayed nightly that Leandre might soon come into his reward.

And then, one night, as Odilie and Leandre watched the great baking oven beside the house and the sheen of the moonlight fell upon them whitely, Leandre spoke softly.

"You are beautiful to-night, my Odilie," he said. "Ah, you have piled your hair upon your head as I have not seen it since you came to me."

"And," said Odilie, softly, "I wear my dress of cloth which came from the Fort."

"As if," said Leandre, "it was a festival."

"Yes," she said, and then silence fell between them for a time, and then, her voice very low and tremulous, she pronounced his name.

"Leandre!"

"Odilie!"

He waited breathlessly, his fine lips parted, his eyes aglow with hope and longing. And then she stood, and he stood before her, motionless, not daring to stir, while she, slowly, slowly, with such a depth of gladness in her eyes as few men may see in the eyes of their women, she lifted her hands and rested them upon his shoulders, timidly, hesitatingly—and still he was motionless. Then she came closer until her face was beneath his face, her lips below his, her body touching

his body, and her hands closed behind his neck to draw his face down to hers and to the touch of her lips.

"Leandre!" she breathed again.

So there, before the great oven, he lifted her in his arms as though she had been a babe and knew that at last he had won a wife. . . .

Donovan Steele alone of the dwellers in the little house was troubled, terrified of the future, a prey to bitter despair. He alone perceived how precarious was their situation—was Nérée Caron's situation—and this was a strange thing, that he should have solicitude to spare upon the fortunes of another. He alone seemed to realize that this time, so peaceful and happy to the three of them, could not endure. There was Cluny to be reckoned with, and Cluny was not a man easily baffled. So he set Leandre to gather news—which was disquieting to him.

Cluny searched. That much was easily demonstrable. It was freely said that Cluny would give to any man a hundred dollars for news of the girl who had run away from him, and in all the villages along the river he had set a watch, so that she could leave the district neither by train nor by boat. Some day, Donovan told himself, Cluny would call to mind the old association between Donovan Steele and Leandre Savard—and would come to see. That was the present danger.

It is necessary to consider the forces which besieged the embittered soul of Donovan Steele, and how, with grim determination, he manned his defenses to hold them at bay. His life was reared upon a premise, and, should that premise be destroyed, the edifice must come crashing to ruin—to worse than ruin—to complete destruction, nothingness. The atoms which composed it would refuse longer to cohere. The premise was this: That mankind was evil in its essence, treacherous,

created to prey, and that God, if indeed there were a God, had created human beings in His own image.

This premise had been demonstrated to him. He believed it and acted upon it. Mother, father, friends, sweetheart had betrayed him—and a saturnine God had finished the thing by striking him with blindness. He made out a strong case.

Yet, during this past year, when he had given himself up wholly to a life in accordance with his beliefs, had arrayed themselves against him certain events and individuals and forces which were by their gradual forward march putting him upon the defensive. For a year he had lived. He knew now that he never had lived during the years which preceded his black night in Quebec; he had merely been, merely existed, breathed, drifted upon the surface without touching the depths and the matters which concerned themselves only with the depths.

First, in this year, had come Leandre Savard. He could not account for Leandre or for his toleration of the man about him. Yet wherever he had gone he had taken Leandre, had, in fact, demanded that Leandre accompany him. In the beginning, perhaps to the end, he had set this down to the selfishness which he prosecuted, to his deliberate ruthless disregard of the rights of others. He had made Leandre Savard his dog. And Leandre had retaliated unconsciously by attacking Donovan's essential premise. If all men were evil and treacherous and self-seeking, how account for Leandre and Leandre's devotion? He was able to sneer this aside for many months—until he witnessed the drama in which Leandre and Odilie were the chief actors—and then those frowning defenses of his were made to tremble. He there witnessed a thing impossible, a marvel, a matter of such depth, such fineness, such loyalty, such *truth* that he could not sneer it aside. He saw and was compelled to accept as true the evidence of a year

of association and of an hour of realization. It was a breach in the walls, a narrow breach, but calamitous. What then? He must admit the fineness of Leandre, so that there did exist a human being who was admirable. He combated this certainty by subterfuge, telling himself that Leandre was the exception, the freak. Nevertheless it was unpleasant and alarming.

Then there was Nérée Caron! From the beginning he had feared her, and now, after days and weeks of closest contact with her, after abiding under a tiny roof with her, watching her, scrutinizing her—eavesdropping upon her soul as one might say—she was taking place beside Leandre. Could it be she was another exception? For hours in each day he studied her acts which had come within his knowledge, repeated her words, dwelt upon *her,* and the breach which Leandre had battered was widened, crumbling at the edges. She, without possibility of reward, was giving her life to his comfort. None knew so well as he that she could hope to gain nothing by it, for he had nothing to give. He was bankrupt indeed. If only she had deserted him in his blindness! That would have helped, but, instead of deserting him in that hour of his need, she had compelled him on, carried him along with the strength of her will and the fine courage of her womanhood. Why?

It was her daily life, her manner, the little things which made up her activities, and the open vista she exhibited into her innermost heart which made their attack felt even more than the outstanding events of their association. As she lived so she was. Donovan rather fancied his keenness, and he was compelled to admit that, for a period of months, she could not pretend, could not live a lie in such a manner as to deceive him. He laid traps for her, lurked to trap her, but in vain.

Nérée Caron was as he saw her, and he could not escape from the certainty of it.

Again and again in constant, angry reiteration, he told himself she was a murderess, a stealthy slayer by poison—that she had foully taken the life of a child, her brother. It was as if he tried to hypnotize himself with the repetition of it, but even as he did so, over and over, something within him laughed at the absurdity of it. No, it would not do. Nérée Caron did not kill her brother! He knew she was innocent, could not have been guilty, but he would not admit it. He asserted and maintained the fact, and jeered at himself secretly for so maintaining.

More than that, he was uneasy when the sound of her voice was beyond reach of his ear, and strangely contented when she sat by his side, speaking gently, or silent. Her nearness was an anæsthetic to dull his despair. This, too, he fought against, railing at himself for his weakness, but it was a thing beyond his control. Nérée Caron had crept into his life, had woven herself into the threads of his existence so cunningly, that she could never be expelled. This he knew also, in the hidden depths of his knowledge, but, also, he would not admit it.

And Nérée! She kept no secrets from herself, withheld no admissions from herself. She loved Donovan Steele, loved him as a sister, loved him as a mother, but above, submerging and engulfing all, she loved him as a woman, loved him with a great, all-embracing splendid love—a love so great that she would have given her life for him, so great that gladly she would have walked herself in everlasting darkness in order that the light of day might again be restored to his eyes.

Upon that point she spoke frequently with Leandre and Odilie, and in the end they reached a conclusion.

"To see him sitting so," said Nérée, "the man that he is!

So big, so splendid! How terrible it must be! The thoughts that must come to him, and the despair!"

"But it will go," said Leandre. "It is a thing which cannot be. No, no, the good God will not permit it. Regard now, we have but the word of the doctor. He it was who said the blindness will remain. Have not doctors been in error before to-day? Eh?"

"I fear there is no error," said Nérée. "No, for him there is no hope in medicine."

"Then," said Leandre, "we must turn to other things." He said it simply, as a practical man changes one plan for another.

"You are thinking—" asked Nérée.

"What mam'selle must already have thought. When doctors fail one, there is always Heaven, is it not so? What, I ask you, are doctors? Eh? They are men and they make to cure out of books. Is it not so? And these books, how comes the knowledge in them? That is a question. It is but a so-little bit of the knowledge of God which he had permitted them to take and to set down on paper—but always he has so much left that they do not know. Also what doctor can make the miracle?" He shrugged his shoulders. "There remains a thing, and that we must do."

"Yes?" said Nérée Caron, eagerly. She knew what he was about to say, but for some reason she could not have put into words she desired to hear him say it.

"We must," said Leandre, "make the pilgrimage. That is the thing. To the good Ste. Anne. And we shall make the good devotion for our friend—yourself, mam'selle, my Odilie, and I—all who love him. And then we shall see."

"But," said Nérée, "he will not go."

"It is," said Leandre, "for mam'selle to make him to go."

"Poor boy!" said Nérée. "It is the bitterness! His heart is sore—his mind is sick."

"These things also Ste. Anne is capable of healing," said Leandre.

Nérée looked into Leandre's eager, confident, simple face. To him, she saw, the thing was as good as done. To his faith it was a truth that there was but need to ask, and it would be given. And his faith reinforced her faith, and in her glowed something of the happiness of his certainty. "He shall go," she said. "I will make him go. I will *make* him go."

Thereafter she and Leandre gave Donovan no peace. When at first they broached the matter with hesitation, he scoffed and sneered and was bitterly ironical—as was his ntaure. But that is what they expected, nor did they look to an easy victory.

"Donovan," said Nérée, in the beginning of the argument (she called him Donovan always now), "Leandre and I have a favor to ask of you."

"What favor have I to grant?" he demanded, harshly. "I am a taker now, not a giver."

"We ask you to go on a journey with us—a little journey?"

"Is there danger?" he demanded, sharply. "Has Cluny found you? Have you been keeping it from me?"

"No," she said, "it is not that."

"Then what? Why a journey? Where do you want me to go?"

"To Ste. Anne de Beaupré," she said.

He did not understand her purpose. "To Ste. Anne de Beaupré! Why there, in Heaven's name?"

"To obtain what can be had from no other source, Donovan."

"Which is—?"

"The sight of your eyes," she said.

"The sight—" He stopped in mid-sentence and turned his body toward her. "To Ste. Anne de Beaupré!" Then he laughed a laugh which had in it no humor. "I see," he said. "You're touched with that idiocy. It's Leandre. Me go to

Ste. Anne! Surely you, with your reasoning mind and your education, don't credit that hocus-pocus! Such superstitions are for Leandre and his kind."

"I would like to think," she said, gently, "that I was worthy to be of Leandre's kind."

At that he was silent. It was a rebuke capable of touching him.

"Will you not go?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"There is no other hope," she said.

"There is *no* hope," he answered.

"If I were blind," she said, "and any hope, any chance, offered, I would not refuse it."

"No," he said. And then, saturninely: "Is it likely this God of yours, or any of his company, would grant a favor to *me?* All I ask of Him is to leave me alone. I've had enough of His attentions."

"The good sainte might not grant the blessing to you, Dono van, but Leandre and Odilie and I will be there also—and she might grant it to *us*."

He considered this; there was a point in it worth considering—not that they might, through their prayers, achieve this miracle upon him, but that they would be there, the three of them, lifting their hearts to Heaven in supplication, not for themselves, but for him; asking a favor for themselves in the form of sight for *his* eyes! A favor for themselves! Then came another thought:

"*You* would go," he asked, "and Leandre and Odilie?"

"Yes."

"With myself that would make an inconspicuous party," he said, ironically.

She did not understand.

"A sort of advertisement," he said. "Don't you know Cluny

is watching? Don't you know that he would be informed before we left La Malbaie? It would be walking into his hands."

"Yes," she said, "I have thought of that."

"What?" The word was loud, savage—something more than startled—appalled.

"It is beside the question," she said.

"To give yourself up after a year of hiding! To walk into the trap! To—to close the prison door on yourself. You are accused of murder," he said, forcing his voice to coldness.

"But I am innocent," she said.

"The more reason to keep out of the trap."

"Donovan," she said, her voice soft, glad, her face alight, "you admit at last—after this long time—you know you believe I am innocent."

He would not answer, struggled against answering, but something within him compelled him to speak the words, to make the admission which he had never made before, even to himself.

"Yes," he said, coldly, "you are innocent."

She stood erect, then bent over him with radiant face, happy as she had not been happy within her recollection, and then she bent over him until her lips brushed his forehead.

"I am so glad—so glad," she said. Then, "So you will go?"

"No. Nonsense! I don't believe this balderdash. And do you think I would walk you into a prison cell while I chased a superstition?"

"Listen, Donovan," she said. "That is my affair." And then, "If I could restore your sight I would willingly step into prison, never to come out again." And with that she left him to think.

He was shaken as he had never been shaken before. For hours he sat motionless, his face stern, set to conceal the turmoil

of his thoughts. She would walk into prison for him! She would give up youth, freedom, the air of heaven, the light of day, and for him—on the remote, the harebrained chance that his eyesight would be restored by a miracle! Greater love hath no man than this. Greater love. . . . These words, out of his distant boyhood, came to him now, repeating themselves over and over and over until he thought he would go mad with the reiteration of them, and with the thought of their meaning—and with the reflection that he—he, Donovan Steele—he, Le Malcœur—was offered the thing they signified. This girl, against whose beauty, against whose sweetness and loveliness, he had steeled himself, this girl whom he had schooled himself to despise—she was offering him that!

Next day she came to him again with the same demand, and Leandre came and Odilie came; and the day after that and the succeeding day. Then came Leandre with news that the *curé* of Ste. Agnès was organizing a pilgrimage to the shrine, and that those of neighboring parts were asked to join to make it memorable.

"Regard now," said Leandre, "we have but to say we will go. The *curé* he sees to all. It is he who procures the tickets and sees to where we shall sleep. Nothing is left to us but to supply the money and to go. There will be many. The *curé* hopes there may go a hundred or even two hundred. And what a thing, m'sieu, if you would go also. What an honor for this parish if this splendid miracle were granted upon its pilgrimage. Oh, m'sieu, you cannot make the refusal. It is not possible."

"It is possible, Leandre. Do you think I will give your God a chance to laugh at me? Ah, how he would sneer to see Le Malcœur cringing and kneeling and whining for a favor."

"Not so, m'sieu. He would be very glad, and his welcome to you would be one of happiness."

"No."

And so it went.

"We must find a way, some way to compel him," said Nérée, and Leandre agreed. "I know what is holding him back," she said. "It is fear for me. It is sweet to know he fears for me."

"Yes."

"But he will not admit it," she said, smiling.

"And," said Leandre, "he does not believe, but you and I, mam'selle—with Odilie added—we have faith enough for many. So he must be made to go."

"It would not be a wicked thing to deceive him," said Leandre.

"But how?"

"By telling him you remain behind," said Leandre, but it is significant that the thought never came to him that she *would* remain behind. No, thoughts of that sort were not for Leandre Savard.

"But even then would he go? Will his hard pride let him go?"

Again Leandre repeated, "He must be made to go."

Now Leandre was simple and direct, and as he thought the matter over a plan came to him. Donovan must be made to go—very well then, suppose one makes him to go. How simple it was. In the night before the pilgrimage the thing could be done. When Donovan slept. He, Leandre, would tie M'sieu Steele with ropes, and carry him to the wagon and drive him so to La Malbaie. But here came a difficulty. How account to the pilgrimage for a man in bonds. Um. Why, simply enough! It was a man, sick of brain, who must be tied. That was it. A man insane, who was being thus taken to Ste. Anne that he might be restored to reason. The thing was feasible. He would discuss it with mam'selle. Regard the simplicity

and the directness of Leandre Savard! Would such a plan have occurred to a more complex, a more artificial man? Decidedly no. It remained for a Leandre to conceive, and for a Leandre to have the resolution, the faith, the courage to carry it out.

And Nérée? She gave her assent, for she knew he could never be convinced, that two obstacles would forever stand between him and Ste. Anne de Beaupré. The first of these was the danger it would bring to her; the second was his stubborn pride and skepticism. So she consented, and so it was done.

On the morning of the day the pilgrimage was to gather, Leandre and Odilie and Nérée went to Donovan's room before the dawn, while yet he was asleep, and bound him, and when he awoke in helpless rage, they pleaded with him to surrender himself, but were adamant to his demands that they set him at liberty. And they carried him down to the wagon, where was a mattress upon which they laid him, and covered him for the drive to La Malbaie. It is perhaps not astonishing that it excited little comment to see one, ill and unable to walk, carried aboard the steamer which was to bear the pilgrimage to Quebec. The blanket which covered Donovan covered as well his bonds, and so Leandre's carefully planned fiction of insanity did not require to be used. But the coming of Leandre and Odilie and the strange young woman—recognized by many as the disappeared niece of Odilon Turcot—was commented upon, and it was rumored that the sick man on the mattress was none other than Le Malcœur who had fought and conquered the man Cluny. All of which, with little delay, was brought to the ears of Cluny himself, so that Cluny drove at breakneck speed to catch the train which would put him in Quebec before the arrival of the pilgrimage.

Once aboard the boat and in a stateroom, the culprits, the conspirators, gathered about Donovan.

"If," said Leandre, who became the spokesman, "m'sieu will promise now to conduct himself as we desire, I will cut the ropes. Behold, m'sieu is here. We are on our way. Already the ship makes herself to move. As for other matters, all the town of La Malbaie has seen us, and that harm is done. M'sieu can undo nothing by making it harder for us all. So, will not m'sieu promise—by nodding his head?"

"Donovan," said Nérée gently, "we are sorry—so sorry—but it was necessary. Promise now."

His eyes glared savagely at them and he writhed in his bonds, but as they protested and argued with him, as they showed him the damage had been done and was irrevocable, he became calmer, and at last nodded his head. But when he was free to speak and move and to sit erect and to walk he fell moody and silent, and this continued for hours. He hated them. He hated them for this humiliation. It was a long time before he spoke, and then he said to Nérée, in a voice so harsh, so forbidding, that it was scarcely to be recognized as his.

"I'll see this through," he said. "I'll go to this shrine of yours and let you pray to this saints. So you may see. You've made fools of yourself for a superstition too silly for children to believe, and you, Nérée Caron, have done an insane thing. So I'll teach you how futile it is." He laughed. "This resolves itself into an expedition to unmask fraud." He shrugged his shoulders. "It will be amusing."

He spoke seldom during what was left of the day, and then only to jeer bitterly at God, at superstitions, at virtue in general, but more especially at the miraculous properties said to reside in the sacred relics enshrined in the church at Ste. Anne de Beaupré.

Chapter *Twenty-five*

To analyze Donovan Steele's mind, to list and appraise its processes during that night's ride down the great river before he slept and in the morning after his early awakening, would be a matter as impossible as to describe the colored designs in a kaleidoscope constantly turned by the busy hands of a child. He was angry, resentful, bewildered, ashamed—all by turns, each of these spreading its color over the borders of the others. He was shaken by the devotion of friends who would resort to means such as they had made use of to bring him to the steamer; he was amazed at the credulity which could urge Nérée Caron to a belief in the miraculous powers resident in the shrine of Ste. Anne of Beaupré. He was sneering, he was harsh, he was silent and thoughtful, he was alarmed, he was bewildered. But, strange as it may be, there was always and ever, running through all his reflections and emotions, a thread of anticipation, a sort of breathless waiting. He was conscious of it, jeered at himself for it. The feeling, as he tried to appraise it, was very much a blood relation to what he had felt as a boy just before setting out to see or to do something surrounded by the glamour of boyish imagination. He tingled with it, was electrical with it.

With it all he was strangely passive; he had passed his word that he would submit, but that was not enough to account for his passivity, which was mental rather than physical. Leandre helped him to dress in the morning—a Leandre high with elation, a boyish, confident, happy Leandre of perfect faith. Leandre *knew* that his friend was to be made to see.

The pilgrimage trooped off the vessel upon the wharf on Quebec's waterfront, and again Donovan Steele and Nérée

Caron stood almost upon the spot where they had encountered for the first time in their lives. Both were conscious of it; neither mentioned it. The hundred or more pilgrims made their way around the half circle of Lower Town to the little odorous red-brick depot from which electric cars were to carry them to Ste. Anne de Beaupré. There they found a throng—other pilgrimages were on their way. The cars were jammed to suffocation.

And so they commenced the final stage of the journey, a journey through blackness for Donovan, a ride through a gracious, storied country for those with eyes to see. The cars crossed the St. Charles and swung eastward to follow the great river's shore, past little villages, past clusters of summer cottages with hills rising abruptly behind them, past churches, convents, monasteries, schools. It was a country in which religion had taken firm and sturdy root; religion was the dominant note of it, and one not accustomed must have marveled at the number and magnitude of the structures devoted to its uses. To right and left barns were blatant with great signs, most of which gave the one command, "*Fumez le tabac.*" Here and there one perceived notices of real-estate men, "*Terrains à louer.*" Capable dogs drew little wagons in the narrow fields, and an occasional sawmill perched upon a hillside beside a jumble of spruce cut back in the mountains. The tracks of the railroad passed along the arable strip of river bank, a sort of shelf reaching back from the St. Lawrence to the first challenging uplift of the foothills, and this shelf was cut and cut and cut again with fences, slicing the rich land into ribbons of fields. Even the names of the towns held their fascination for the stranger. There was "L'Ange Guardien." What, one demanded to know, was this people who could choose such a name for their dwelling place. To live in a hamlet called The Guardian Angel! It is only where

God is very real, where saints and angels condescend to mingle with everyday life, that such things are possible.

After a time the freighted cars crept past the wonder of the world which bears the name of Montmorency Falls—and then, as one cast an eye backward over the shoulder, he could realize Quebec. Quebec the magnificent! Quebec the city of the past—the populous rock which set itself sturdily to maintain for the eyes of this generation the glamour of dead centuries. There it reared itself, lofty, frowning, its roofs glowing in the morning sun; its towers and ramparts softened by the distance. On and on the pilgrims rode; more villages, scores of brooks, little waterfalls, a brick building given to the pressing of wine from the grape—then the beginning of Ste. Anne de Beaupré and the tiny sawmill whose lofty business it is to cut huge timbers for the commencement of the erection of the new Basilica!

And then Ste. Anne de Beaupré itself! At first, on the left, a rambling frame hotel, then an ornate brick kiosk for the sale of post cards and strings of great wooden beads and holy images and medals of Ste. Anne and St. Christophe—the latter to be blessed and fastened upon the dashboards of motor cars as a talisman against accident, the former to be screwed securely to some favored spot on shipboard, a protection against wind and sea.

On the right, its feet in the marsh, upreared the many-sided ugliness of the mammoth Cyclorama—with its *magazin du Cyclorama* in which one purchased twenty-five cents' worth of souvenirs to procure a ticket of admission to view that stupendous feat of the painter's brush, a thing not to be sneered at by the dilettante, but to be looked at with reverence and amazement and admiration by all. Then on the other side of the tracks came the little station, and stretching away from

it the iron fence which surrounds the park of the Basilica, within which is the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré.

There the pilgrims alighted in a swarm upon the graveled approach and entered the inclosure, each parish shepherded by its *curé*. Over against them was the huge temporary church of wood, erected in a matter of days after the disaster, to house the relics preserved from the flames—the miraculous statue of Ste. Anne, the beautiful carvings in stone which surround the great altar—and to provide a place of worship to the hundreds of thousands who journey thither from all quarters of the American continent either as labor of devotion or in hope of surcease from physical ills. Here again were two kiosks for the sale of trinkets and souvenirs, and another faced the road beyond.

None of this could Donovan see save with the eye of memory, the memory of a bemused laboring man who had earned his bread upon that site for a few long weary days. Still he was silent, curiously silent and passive, his face bleak as a winter hillside, his jaw set and stern. His friends did not disturb his silence, but contented themselves with guiding him through the press. Leandre was elated; Odilie was gravely, childishly interested and uplifted; Nérée was atremble with hope and dread, with the knowledge that the thing they came to beseech could be—but might not be vouchsafed.

For the scores of pilgrims it was a day mingling sightseeing and devotion, an excursion and a pilgrimage. They clustered everywhere, wearing the ribbons announcing the names of their parishes, chattering, gesticulating, milling about the common center, which was the church door. For Nérée and Leandre and Odilie it was more than a pilgrimage—it was a quest, and their hearts were questing hearts. For Donovan it was a chase of the wild goose, and the nearer he approached

the unavoidable thing the higher arose his resentment against it and his humiliation.

Of one thing he was unaware. He did not know that, as they passed through the gate to the cars in Quebec, Cluny had stood there smiling saturninely, lifting his hat to Nérée!

"Well," said Donovan, ironically, "you've got me here. When do we begin?"

"Begin!" exclaimed Odilie, who spoke so seldom, was so shy, so self-effacing ever. "But, m'sieu we have begun long ago. Is it not so, my husband? These many days we have been preparing the good Ste. Anne for our coming—in our prayers. For days and nights we have made it clear to her that we would be here today . . . so she would know and be ready."

"Is it so, Odilie?" Donovan said, almost gently. For some reason incomprehensible to him he had never been harsh with her, more pliable to her solicitude—even restrained in his sneers at Heaven when she was by.

"It is so, m'sieu . . . and you may be sure that she knows. For they were good prayers—my husband's and mine, made by grateful hearts. And Mam'selle Nérée's—ah—you may rest assured those were good prayers also. For a reason, m'sieu."

"For what reason?"

"It is not for me to speak of it," she said, gravely, "but the good sainte knows—she who must have loved well, having borne a child."

But then, at the hum of voices, at the consciousness of an eager, curious crowd, his thoughts hardened his face. "I will not be stared at," he said, savagely. "I will not be made a spectacle."

"Would you," asked Leandre, simply, "feel shame to display your love of your mother—even before strangers?"

"My mother!" said Donovan, bitterly.

"Those who come here to-day," said Nérée, quietly, "are not thinking of you, Donovan, or watching you. Each has his own petition to make and favor to ask. They think upon the sins they have committed and are filled with fear lest they be unworthy. No, they will have no thought for you . . . except, if healing should come to you, that they will look upon you as blessed and regard you with reverence."

"Regard!" said Odilie. "They go into the church. After that there will be confessions and the making of good devotions—and the processions. Come, let us go."

They led Donovan up the steps and into the great, bare church, past the gigantic wooden image of Ste. Anne which had topped the façade of the old Basilica, and which, though tinder dry and wrapped in flames, had yet escaped with scarcely a scratch. This, the good brothers point out, is significant. Slowly they guided him past crutches and braces and anatomical shoes and spectacles which hung from the wall or stood in racks—evidences of the power of the sainte vouchsafed since the conflagration; an earnest that those great mountains of crutches destroyed by the fire would be renewed with the passage of the years. Presently they found a seat hard by one of the little compartments walled off about the outer wall of the church for the purposes of confession, and there, after the genuflections demanded by reverence, they seated him, with Leandre upon one side and Nérée upon the other. They knelt for a moment; he sat stiffly erect, defiant.

It was a sight worth traveling to see—the interior of that church, crowded with pilgrims—and to appreciate the meaning and beauty of it all. To a child, ignorant, seeing only with the curious eyes of childhood, it would have been fascinating. There, far ahead of them, reared the altar, ornate yet resting upon a dignity all its own, and before it scores upon scores of restless candle flames, vigil lights, twinkling in

their variously colored chalices of glass. It lay an arresting hand upon the breath, bore down with an impressiveness not to be avoided. Before the altar, on the floor of the church itself and in advance of the rail of whose stone carvings the Brothers are so proud, upreared a slender pedestal and column, atop of which, glowing with color, magnificent in its diadem of jewels, bowed the miraculous statue of Ste. Anne with the infant Madonna upon her breast. About its foot knelt pilgrims to imprint upon the glass protecting the relic inset in the stone of its base the kiss of reverence. To the right and behind the rail, upon its high place, the casket containing the Great Relic, the largest of the possessions of the shrine—a piece of bone from the wrist of the sainte whose glory it was that she had given life to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Over on the left, beneath its brass canopy, stood that other statue of the sainte which it is the custom to raise aloft upon the shoulders of pilgrims and to carry in the processions; and beyond that the priceless painting, the votive offering of the Marquis of Tracy, painted by the famous Lebrun and given to the Sanctuary in 1666. Other treasures of the shrine were there, perhaps not visible to the eye at the distance, or perhaps, for safe keeping, in the iron safes behind the altar: the mass vestment made by the hands of Anne of Austria, mother of the Grand Monarque, and presented as a thank offering for the birth of a son after twenty years of childless marriage; the carven ivory altar crucifix; the great gold chalice incrusted with precious gems; offerings of grateful pilgrims; the pyx containing the Holy Viaticum without which no Catholic wishes to bid farewell to this world; the seal of the Mexican president Santa Anna, with its ruby-eyed eagle—all these and an abundance of other treasures were there, memorials of antiquity and testaments to the piety of the great and the humble.

The officiating priests, moving to and fro, the choir in its

place—these made the scene complete and endowed it with the necessity of life. But none of it could Donovan Steele see as he sat, stiff backed, between his friends. The chant did not move him, nor the responses of the congregation—did not take his mind off himself, off the humiliation he suffered. It seemed to him that thousands of eyes were upon him jeeringly, that scores of lips were whispering about him, laughing at him. He stirred angrily, and Nérée laid a stilling hand upon his knee. After that he sat immobile.

After the service they waited, at the door of the confessional, which each, first Odilie, then Leandre, then Nérée entered to make their peace with God, and having done so, they spoke in a whisper to Donovan.

"Come," said Nérée.

"Where?"

"To the altar that we may venerate the relic," said Nérée.

"For this mob to watch?"

"None watches you, Donovan. No one thinks of you."

"The absurdity of it! The childishness," he said, in a fierce whisper.

"You gave your promise," she reminded.

"If this sainte of yours wants to perform a miracle upon me, why can't she do it here as well as there?" he demanded.

"There is a right way and a wrong way to all things. Donovan," she said, gravely, "are you going to make all our work and all our prayers and all our sacrifice vain—for vanity?"

"Sacrifice?"

"I would not have told you except to urge you to be compliant in this. Yes, Donovan, sacrifice. I have come to the end. Cluny was waiting for me in Quebec."

"He saw you?"

"He leered at me," said Nérée.

Donovan fell silent, his head dropped, his face expressed

emotions which were not pleasant to bear. This girl—this woman he had sought to avoid—had done this great thing for him; made this sacrifice, which might prove to be the supreme sacrifice, to bring him to this spot in the wild, the foolish hope that the sight of his eyes would be restored by a miracle! A miracle! He closed his teeth grimly on a laugh. Well, the least he could do would be to see the thing through, and, after its absurdity was proven, to sneer at her for throwing away her life for a superstition. To shrug his shoulders had become a habit since his blindness.

"Let us have it over," he said.

In this frame of mind they conducted him down the wide aisle, past the jewel-crowned image to the spot where the relic awaited their veneration. In turn they pressed their lips to the glass under which it lay, a glass worn dim by the reverent lips of thousands of devotees.

"Will you not kiss the relic?" Nérée asked, hesitatingly.

"No," said Donovan.

After a pause she said: "It does not matter. It is through *our* prayers and *our* reverence and *our* devotion that the favor must come . . . because we, who believe, are supplicating for you. If *we* are found worthy . . ."

And so they knelt in a little group about him and prayed.

Something compelled him to bend his stiff neck; there was a weight upon him, an apprehension, the tingle of anticipation. He could not stand there, scoffer, unbeliever, though he was, and feel no impress from the solemnity of the place or from the simple faith and beautiful trust of these, his friends. He did not think, could not think. Always in the back of his mind lurked the *possibility*. He could not avoid that. What, he asked, as any human being must have asked, if this thing is true? What if this sainte can cure my blindness—does cure my blindness? No matter how firmly he knew the absurdity

of it, nevertheless he could not escape reflections upon its *possibility*. What if? What if?

Long they prayed, each in his way—and nothing happened. Blackness remained before his eyes as blackness had been before his eyes, but he saw it through to the end without protest. It was Nérée's right to demand that. And then they arose and searched his face with hopeful eyes.

"You see," he said, coldly.

"Has nothing— Do you not—see—oh, just a little?" asked Nérée.

"No. Let us go."

"Perhaps," said Odilie, "it is I who am unworthy. The sainte may reject *my* petition."

Leandre's hand sought hers. "It is not that, my wife," he said. And then: "But we have only commenced. It is morning. Does the favor always come at the commencement and at the first asking? I have heard otherwise. There remains the procession. Also we must not neglect the Scala Santa. And miracles have been wrought at the fountain before the chapel. I have heard."

"I will not be led about like a dog on a string," said Donovan.

"For this one day—this single day out of your life," said Nérée, "you shall do as I ask." And, hearing her voice, Donovan knew that this was so.

As they walked down the aisle again to the door and were passing out to the graveled court a young Redemptorist greeted them with fine, smiling eyes.

"Ah," he said, noting how they led Donovan by the hand. "You have come asking a favor of the sainte? I pray that it be granted you."

"We have made our confessions and have venerated the relic," said Leandre, "but matters remain as you see."

The brother smiled again. "Do not be discouraged," he

said, gently. "One may not know when the sainte will grant her favors. Sometimes it is before the Great Relic; sometimes it comes while the fortunate one sits listening to the mass. It may come in the morning; it may come in the evening, here, there, or in some other spot. There have been miracles at the fountain yonder and upon the sacred stairway. Who may say what spot She will choose. And it is true that sometimes the miracle has been wrought after the petitioner has returned to his home. Aye, I know of such a case."

"I knew," said Odilie, "that we must not be discouraged."

"No, my daughter, for if you be worthy, and if in Her wisdom She sees fit to vouchsafe a miracle, it will come."

Now the procession was forming to carry the image of Ste. Anne from its resting place beside the altar, out of doors and over the walks of the little park. Scores of candles carried by pilgrim hands flickered in its train—and this they watched before they trudged through the iron gates and out upon the road which separates the grounds of the Basilica from the ancient hillside cemetery with its four heroic bronze stations of the cross; from the chapel constructed on the site and from the ruins of the old stone church, or Third Sanctuary; from the little structure containing on its lower floor a Grotto of the Agony, and above the Scala Santa. High above these, topping the ridge, rear the walls of the cloistered Redemptoristine Nuns, the home of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of St. Mary, where one, if a woman, may find food and lodging; if a man, food alone.

A pause was made to drink the waters of the holy well, a spring gushing from the hillside close to the chapel, and to offer there a little prayer. Of this well the good brothers say, "If the waters of Ste. Anne's holy well do not possess in themselves the power of curing sickness and infirmity, God may, if He chooses, work miracles by its use, and no one would

dare deny Him that right." And of it they also say that it is not the water that effects the cure, but the deserving faith of the suppliant who drinks of it.

Then, presently, for it was noon, the four went to one of the many restaurants which face the street and rested and refreshed themselves with food, after which Nérée insisted that they go on upon the quest which brought them there. They entered now the Grotto of the Agony and there, in the moistened tray provided for the pious act, burned each a candle before those sculptured representations of the Dreadful Night in Gethsemene. Throughout this movement Donovan had maintained a grim silence, eloquent of his displeasure and impatience. And now, as they helped him up the steps which led to the chapel of the Scala Santa, he protested.

"What now?" he asked, and sulkily. "Have you not dragged me about enough to satisfy you?"

"Here," said Leandre, reverently, "is the Sacred Stairway. Ah, how one weeps at the thought! Does not one picture it?"

"Picture what?" Donovan asked, curtly.

"The blessed Jesus climbing the twenty-eight steps to appear before the wicked Pilate. It was for us, m'sieu, for you and mam'selle and Odilie and me he climbed such steps as these in agony. It is a memento, m'sieu, so that as we to-day make to climb, we will think of Him who mounted so great a time ago."

"The stairs you climb on your knees?" Donovan demanded, with a sneer.

"How otherwise, m'sieu, would one climb where once the feet of the blessed Jesus pressed?" Leandre asked the question so simply, so earnestly, that Donovan found no irony to utter. "And we shall climb to-day, we three, and on each step we shall say a prayer for m'sieu," said Leandre.

They entered the door and found themselves the sole occu-

pants of the chapel. Before them the broad, polished wooden steps swept upward—twenty-eight steps to end in a lofty roofed room above.

"Be patient, Donovan," said Nérée. "See, you shall stand here. It is close beside the door and you may rest against the wall. Do not move until we come for you." And then they left him, and by the sound of their movements he could tell as they knelt side by side upon the lower step of the stairs.

What irreverences he uttered now, or thought, were forced. Since he stood in the church before the Great Relic he had been aware how he forced himself to utterances which he knew the ears of his friends would hear as impious. It was strange that in his secret heart was no derision, but rather a grave question. His mind still declared the absurdity of it all, but the atmosphere of the place rested upon him, impressed him, destroyed his raillery and stilled his sneers at Heaven. And now as he stood alone listening, listening, he felt a sense of apprehension, a sense of the dignity of the thing—no matter how mistaken it might be. He felt the power of its appeal, and, gradually, as the rustling and movement told them they had mounted another step, a thing which very much bore resemblance to respect. He listened and counted.

They were on the third step now . . . now the fifth . . . the sixth. How slowly they climbed, but it was upon their knees—and every step counted three prayers offered for *him!* The eighth step . . . the tenth. A bewilderment settled upon him, a chill of awe, a breathlessness of amazement. What was happening to him. How had he so weakened as to let this thing take hold of him? They were on the twelfth step . . . the thirteenth! His hands trembled and he sought to clench them; his mouth was dry. He was lonesome; he wanted to cry out to them to come back to him as he stood in his darkness. They were upon the seventeenth step . . . the

nineteenth . . . and for each step Heaven had received three prayers for him—prayers uttered out of believing hearts; prayers uttered out of a great sacrifice—Nérée Caron's sacrifice. How in tune with the meaning of the place was sacrifice! He could see the poetry of it, the fitness! They were on the twentieth step, and he strained his blind eyes upward, crouching forward now, his hands lifting toward them. He was terrified! Something greater than himself, something terrible, something incomprehensibly regal and vast and overwhelming, terrified him. His mind still counted. They were upon the twenty-fifth step. And then his voice, hoarse, rising almost to the thinness of a shriek—a cry wrung from his soul, pierced its way through the air to their ears.

"Nérée!" he cried. "Nérée! . . ." And then a pause as, arms wide flung, he tottered forward toward the lowest step. "Nérée! . . . *My God!*" This last was a cry of terror, of realization, a frightful cry to hear. "My God! . . . I see! . . . *I see!*" . . .

And even as they turned to regard him with startled amazement, he reached the foot of the Sacred Steps and flung himself down upon the first of them, hiding his face and uttering again and again, in the awestruck voice of a frightened child who finds unexpected comfort and safety, the name of God. "God! . . . God! . . . God! . . ." he murmured over and over, chokingly.

Chapter *Twenty-six*

If there was any slight upon God, any failure of reverence in it, be sure that He overlooked it when the three arose, startled, breathlessly, astoundedly joyous, and descended that stairway to Donovan. It was not a moment for emotions; it was a moment in which nothing but awe could find place. They bent over him, touched him with fingers which almost dared not to touch the clay upon which the hand of God had wrought. And he! How picture the mind of Donovan Steele! In the first instant, that awful instant in which came to him realization that he *saw,* a dreadful consternation seized him. He was appalled! His soul was wrenched with a white, vivid fear—fear of the Sublimity powerful to do this thing to him. He was not a man, as he crouched there before the Deity he had scorned; he ceased to be material; the thing that was Donovan Steele tore free of flesh and stood quivering and bare. He did not think: he felt; he *realized.*

They lifted him and led him forth silently. The time was not yet for the offering of thanks. Their minds could not encompass words of thanks; the thing was too awful, too crushing in its sublimity for syllables which could be spelled with the letters of an alphabet. It was in the door, under that arched portico, that he paused, lifted his head, and stood with wide-swept arms, gazing, gazing with terrible, hungry intensity upon that little patch of earth.

"I see! . . . I see! . . ." he cried, in a curious voice, but the three who accompanied him had not the perception of the All-seeing to know that it was not to the sight of his eyes that he referred. They looked into his face, and it was alight, alight but painted with a tremendous gravity. It was the face

of the man they knew, yet not his face—a thing had altered it; where had been the daub of an amateur was now the refining touch of the master. Line for line, feature for feature, it was Donovan Steele's face—yet something glowed there, something lived there which, had they not spent this great moment by his side, would have caused them all to pass him upon the street unrecognized.

Then he spoke again, and this time of the world they, too, could see.

"It is beautiful," he said, musingly. "The world is beautiful. I thought it hideous."

Again silently they walked by his side as he descended the steps to the road, and as they passed faces were turned toward them and devout hands made the sign of the cross.

"There has been a miracle!" men whispered, and regarded Donovan with reverence.

He turned, they not knowing his destination or daring to ask, and ascended the hillside to its very top, and there again he paused and looked, and *looked*. He had climbed to *see*—to stand upon that eminence and to feed his hungry eyes with the distances which could be his only from the summit of a hill.

And then, as if for the first time, he seemed to see his friends. From one to the other he turned his face, gazing into their eyes with such a gaze that it called the waiting tears to their eyes, and then he said a strange thing.

"I didn't know," he said. "It all looked different before." And then, "I must apologize to Him." Which was a strange saying if one did not know the man, if one did not know Le Malcœur, and the bitterness and hardness—and splendid, fearless, ruthless manhood of Le Malcœur. "I must apologize to Him!"

"You must thank Him," said Nérée, softly.

"No," said Donovan, saying again a strange thing. "It is

not thanks He wants of me." And it was given to Nérée to read his heart and its meaning—and to agree with his words. No! God wanted not thanks from Donovan Steele for this miracle, not thanks, not words, not gratitude—but submission!

He turned to them. "If you will leave me here," he said, "and come back—presently. I have a great deal to do."

They went, and for an hour Donovan sat there alone with wide eyes drinking in the light of day, the sweep of hills, the reach of river, the movement of life. It was as if he had never seen before and all the world were a new thing to him, new and strange and teeming with marvels. . . . Of that hour Donovan has never spoken, never has disclosed what transpired —that hour which he spent alone with the Deity whom it had been his conduct to deride.

When he descended the hill he was calm; he had found himself; he had realized and accepted his realizations. He was a *third man.* Once he had been Donovan Steele, the wistful boy with haunting eyes who loved and feared and dared not hope for fidelity and confidence. He had been gentle then and grave and self-contained because he had learned through trying experience not to give of himself to any. Yet he had given because his was a nature made for affections, for friendships, for love. That was the *first man.* Then, after days of soul tumult, after a period of what was little short of madness, he had become Le Malcœur, a man without friendships, a man who despised his fellows and knew no compassion for their frailties or admiration for their achievements. Selfish, hard, cold, relentless in the pursuit of his aims he had been; bitter, centered upon himself, without hope, he had been driven—God's fugitive—to wander and to labor. A bleak, troubled year that had been; a year of protest, a year, nevertheless of growth and of high experiences which had, in spite of him, added to the stature of his soul. . . . And that was the *second man.* Now

he was—what only the future might determine, but it was neither the first nor the second man, but a new creature, contributed to by both, but bigger than both, finer than both, refined by fire, and—in that last unendurable white flash of flame—burned clean of malignant growths as he had been purged of his blindness—a man whose unseeing eyes had been made to see again the world. Those unseeing eyes had been made to see a world he had never beheld before.

"It is beautiful," he had said. "I thought it hideous."

That expressed the change. Those words had said all. Their meaning was deeper than his friends could realize, for it was not alone the physical world he spoke of—the little patch of scenery which spread before his eyes—but the *world*. Existence! Life! That was the *third man*. A man whose eyes had been opened to see that the existence of man was an inclosure of beauty, teeming with marvels, capable of radiance and lofty splendor! . . .

Below the cemetery gate he came upon his friends where they had awaited him, keeping their vigil in patience, in exaltation. . . . A Redemptorist father held them in conversation.

"Is this the man?" the father asked, as Donovan approached.

"It is he," said Nérée, and waited with apprehension to see how Donovan would conduct himself toward this man of the Church.

"My son," said the Redemptorist, "God has been good to you this day."

"Yes," said Donovan, simply.

"You have been chosen from many to receive a blessing."

"Yes," said Donovan again.

"What is your soul moved to do, my son? Many who have received as you have received this day consider it as a token of selection."

"You mean," asked Donovan, gravely, "that many enter the Church—to become ministers—priests?"

"Perhaps not that—for that is a matter of years of labor and study and devotion. But the Church and the shrine must have their laborers in other fields."

"Ah," said Donovan, and he paused, reflecting. "To enter an order, become a Redemptorist brother or a Franciscan or a Cistercian, perhaps. No, Father. Neither course is for me. It is not for me to hide from the world. The peace and safety of a brother's life are not for me."

"You seem certain," said the father.

"I know," Donovan said, simply.

"Then what, my son?"

"To live," said Donovan.

The Redemptorist studied his face a moment and then he said:

"I understand. I think you are right, my son. And may the blessing of God and the holy saints go with you in your living."

They turned away and walked, aimlessly, without objective.

"To live," Donovan said again.

After a time Nérée spoke—only his name, timidly, hesitatingly—"Donovan . . ."

It was as if she had sounded a tocsin, an alarm. It was only his name uttered by her lips, yet it was sufficient to awaken him—to bring him to that thing of which he had spoken—to call him to life. He stopped in his tracks, and his face which had been so gravely serene was overspread by a shadow. He had known an hour of something like *nirvana*—and now life stalked out to meet his challenge. He realized the existence of his friends as human beings, as creatures of flesh and blood concerned in the affairs of the world. His eyes became overcast, his lips pressed together, and his chin set;

it was not the face of a man who beholds a vision now, but the face of one who was called upon by the stern demands of life to act. He breathed deeply—for his hour was gone.

"You . . ." he said. "You . . ." And then, "I had forgotten—what you paid to bring me here."

"I'm glad—glad," she said, softly.

He nodded. "I know. But now we must act. Do you think I can give you up to *that?*"

"It doesn't matter," she said. "Some day—some time—it was bound to come."

"No," he said.

She laid her hand upon his arm. "Donovan," she said, "I am glad—relieved. I beg of you to believe me. It is over—the apprehensions, the fears, the dreadful uncertainty of living as I have lived. Don't think of it. Oh, you can't know. It was always with me. Day and night it was with me—the consciousness that I was hiding; the knowledge that the next moment I might be discovered. Now I know what I must do. I am not afraid."

"I," he said, "know what *I* must do."

She lifted her face to him in question, but did not speak. He turned to Leandre and put his hand on the man's shoulder. "You and I," he said, "have a thing to do, have we not"—he paused here and then added the word which made Leandre happy—"my friend."

Leandre's eyes shone. "He calls me his friend . . . I am his friend," he said as a delighted child might speak.

"I think," said Donovan, "that you have been my friend a long time—but I did not know it. I did not know many things. You have stood by me through this year, Leandre, when I needed you. I had to have a friend—though I did not know that. You—without you I could not have gone on."

"M'sieu!"

"Now," said Donovan, "we will work together as we never worked—you and I. We have been men together, have we not?"

"It is so."

"You—you will not make to travel again, m'sieu!" It was Odilie who spoke. "No, m'sieu—you will not take my husband from me."

"Not for a day, not for an hour, if it can be avoided, Odilie."

"M'sieu means," said Leandre, "that we must protect mam'selle from—*them*."

"Yes," said Donovan.

Odilie smiled, first upon her husband, then upon Nérée. "For that," she said, "I can let him go—even for a year if it must be so."

"First," said Donovan, "we must take her away—quickly. We know safe places in which to hide her, do we not, Leandre? And in one of these I shall leave her with you and Odilie to care for her."

"And you, m'sieu?"

"My work," said Donovan, and his face became grim, took on something of its old relentlessness, "shall be to make it unnecessary for her to hide."

"Ah, I see. It is good. You will find these men who have betrayed her and make them tell the truth. That is it. But I should like to see that, m'sieu. I should like to see you wring the truth from them."

"It will not be so easy as that, *mon brave*."

Nérée stretched out her hands to both of them. "No," she said. "I have made my determination. I will not hide. I will have no more of it. I am going to Quebec."

"To Quebec!"

"To give myself up. Oh, I am innocent—and I shall give myself up—"

"To be thrust into a prison! To live and sleep in a cell as if you were a criminal! *No.* You don't understand. They will try you and convict you. You must wait, wait till I have the proof."

"I shall give myself up," she said again.

"No."

"I am determined."

"You brought me here against my will," said Donovan. "Leandre and I will hide you—against your will if you compel us."

She shook her head. "I will not be hidden. I shall face it. No, my mind is firm, and you cannot shake me. I go to Quebec."

They protested, all of them, but she would not be turned aside. "If you force me away, I will not hide. I will come back. You cannot pick me up here—in all this crowd—and carry me away. No, I am going. I am going *now*."

"It is a madness," said Leandre.

"Let me go. Do not try to prevent me."

"Cluny is there—waiting."

"I am not afraid of Cluny—any more."

"You shall not go. I say you shall not go."

She smiled. "Will you come with me? I—I will be braver if you—you three—are there when—"

"If we are there when you give yourself up! But afterward! What of the afterward? What of the days and weeks—perhaps the years behind bars—and alone. We cannot go there with you, Nérée. Think of that."

"I have thought," she said, "and if it comes to that I shall be brave. You shall see."

"But you are innocent. You did not do this dreadful thing, and you shall not suffer for it."

"It is sweet to hear you say I am innocent," she said. And then, "Will you come with me?"

"No. No."

"Then I must go alone," she said, quietly, firmly, sadly.

"I cannot bear it," Donovan said, fiercely. "I will not bear it."

"You must bear it," she said. "Afterward—when I am *there*—then you may do your best. You may fight for me then, if you will. But I cannot live under this thing another day. It is unbearable, dreadful. I must put it to the proof. Oh, can't you see? Can't you see?"

"First give me time—"

"To-day," said Nérée, and with firm step she turned to walk again through the park of the Basilica, and, strangely, there was relief in her heart at her decision, relief and exaltation. What could they do? They could not prevent her. They could not seize her to carry her away, and so they followed, entreating, protesting.

As they journeyed toward Quebec once more they continued their pleadings; as the carriage drove them from the station, up the cobbled, winding streets of the old city to the Château which neither of them had visited for a year, they continued to entreat her, but to no effect.

"I dont know how to do it," she said, tremulously. "You must help me. How do I—give myself up?"

"Wait," begged Donovan. "*Think!* It is almost too late."

"It is too late," she said. "If you will not help me, I must act alone. I shall go to the hotel. From there I shall call—whom it is necessary to call."

In silence now they were driven along the Grand Battery overlooking the St. Charles and the embankment; past those rows of ancient, forbidding cannon, past the porte of the Archbishop's Palace and out upon the Place d'Armes. And then, with Champlain's monument arising in their faces, they drew up at the carriage entrance to the great hotel and there alighted.

Silently they walked through the shelter to the steps which led into the hotel, and these they mounted slowly—as they might have mounted the steps of a scaffold—and entered the deserted lobby.

As they stepped into this pillared room the elevator reached the floor and its door clanged back. From it emerged Cluny, and in the shock of the face-to-face meeting they perceived—as one will perceive trifles at such time—that in his flattened palm he carried three ripe red strawberries.

Chapter *Twenty-seven*

Cluny's first act upon arriving in Quebec was to wire Xavier Caron in Montreal, guardedly apprising him of the main fact of Nérée's appearance. Xavier's keen brain realized that the climax of his affairs was upon him, and considered, in his devious, yet bold; stealthy, yet curiously rash manner, what was best to be done. It was perhaps strange that he thought upon Cluny rather than upon Nérée. Cluny was an obstacle, an encumbrance, a threat, and Xavier did not like threats. It was because of this that his movements, when he arrived in Quebec at midday of the same day which saw Donovan and Nérée in Ste. Anne de Beaupré, were not without peculiarity. The most peculiar of all his movements was the purchase of a basket of strawberries.

Perhaps an hour after the arrival of his train in the city he was registered in the hotel. In his room he spent some fifteen minutes, and then, what was odd in itself, he walked the two flights to the chamber occupied by Cluny, upon whose door he rapped for admission. Perhaps absent-mindedly he carried under his arm the basket of strawberries.

Cluny opened the door to him and he stepped quickly inside—with a satisfied feeling that none had seen him on his way or entering the room.

"Well?" he asked.

"She's at Ste. Anne de Beaupré," said Cluny. "Her and Steele. He's blind," Cluny added.

"You're certain."

"I seen them."

"Excellent. Now we're ready for the final curtain, and then your natural anxiety and my apprehensions will be at an end."

He walked to the desk beside which Cluny was sitting and set down casually the basket of strawberries, and then, leaning there gracefully, a striking, distinguished figure, he smiled down at Cluny.

"What precautions have you taken?"

"They're bein' watched every minute."

"Ah, I knew you might be depended upon. Now let us consider. It occurs to me that it would be as well if information came to the police from sources other than you and myself."

"I'll get a man to telephone—anonymous-like. The police is used to gettin' information that way."

"True. Then, once my niece is in custody, what have we to apprehend. Um. A speedy trial is what we must hope for. In the circumstances I doubt if we need apprehend any rallying to her of old friends. The facts are too obvious for that. No, she will have no friends."

"But this man Steele."

"True. But he is blind."

Cluny nodded.

"If all goes well, my partner"—Xavier emphasized the word —"another sixty days ought to see us rewarded for all our trouble." Idly his fingers played with the paper wrapping which concealed the strawberries, and as if by accident a finger tore a gap in the top.

"A fine fruit, the strawberry," he said, shaking his head and smiling. "Are you familiar with Izaak Walton, m'sieu? What is it he said of them. I quote freely. 'Doubtless God could have made a finer fruit than the strawberry, but it is certain he never did so.' I quite agree with him. Now what," he asked, curiously, "could have induced my niece to go openly to the shrine? It is not like her intelligence or her determination. Yet one can never tell about a woman! Women of the Caron blood have done strange things, m'sieu, and I mistrust

this is one of the strangest—perhaps finest. Nérée Caron is possessed of wonderful potentialities."

Cluny stared at the man, marveling.

"Yes," said Xavier. "I can guess it. The man Steele—whom you call Le Malcœur—is blind, is he not? Possibly indebted to you for that, my friend. It will be then that my niece has given her heart to him. That will be it. And she is very devout, which is as it should be and as her careful education should have taught her. So she takes the man she has loved to the shrine in the hope of a miracle. You see how easy it is to reach the truth when one knows the woman. Yes, my niece sacrifices herself with deliberation to serve the man she loves. Splendid!"

Negligently he tore wider the rent in the wrappings which covered the strawberries and pushed them with a casual gesture toward Cluny. "I've never seen them larger," he said, "or finer."

Cluny's fingers sought the basket in obedience to the suggestion, sought it mechanically, for his thoughts were elsewhere, and absent-mindedly fumbled the berries until they selected a little group of three from the top. Xavier's eyes were upon him, burning coldly. Cluny lifted a berry to his lips, but at his very lips his hand paused and he raised his eyes to meet that strange, concentrated gaze of Xavier's. Slowly, very, very slowly, he lowered his hand again, and as slowly got to his feet. Then, as a man might step aside from the neighborhood of some loathsome, venomous reptile, he sidled away, his face white, his eyes widely staring, fixed in horror upon Caron's face.

"You—you *devil!*" he whispered, hoarsely. It was not an epithet one would have expected from Cluny's lips. One would have expected a coarser, more emphatic expletive, but Cluny was shaken, rocked from his firm foundations.

Xavier did not move, nor did his expression change. His command of himself in that moment was amazing.

"What is the matter, my friend?" he asked, and in his voice was only mild curiosity.

"Matter! . . . You—you—" Cluny's tongue could find no epithet to his need. "Them berries," Cluny said, putting his thoughts into words, "is *poisoned*."

Xavier Caron's clock had struck twelve, and he knew it—but his manner remained unchanged. He did not take the trouble to deny what was so easily to be proven.

"What did you expect?" he asked with a shrug. "Surely not that I, Xavier Caron, would submit to blackmail."

Cluny was trembling, frightened—he who could face a mob of men, whom no lethal weapon could have terrified, felt weak and sick with the fear which poison inspires. He gave back a step.

"This settles you," he rasped.

"I suppose so," said Xavier. "Well, we cannot always succeed."

Cluny might have strangled the man where he stood, might with impunity have smashed and broken him, but he did nothing. He dare not touch Xavier. He gave a back step. "You devil!" he said again.

"Such a tiny space divides success from failure," said Xavier, plaintively.

Cluny gave back a step, still facing Caron, and felt behind him for the knob of the door. "You're done! You're done!" he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"I suppose," said Xavier, "you are going to the police."

"With *these*," said Cluny, "and with what I know."

"It was always," said Xavier, "a contingency to be taken into consideration. Well, I see no way to prevent you. Arguments, of course, would be futile—and I doubt if you could

ever be bought to any degree of confidence in my intentions again. I bid you good afternoon, m'sieu."

Cluny slammed shut the door. Xavier waited a moment, smiling faintly; then he picked up his basket of strawberries, walked without haste to the door, and descended the stairs to his own room. There he removed collar and cravat and shaved with care; afterward he dressed again, taking pains with the brushing of his hair. He even saw to the condition of his nails and looked to see that no fleck of mud marred the polish of his shoes. When this was done he sat down in the big arm-chair with a pillow behind his head, and was at some trouble to assume a posture at once comfortable and dignified. Thus he sat for a moment considering if all were well—if he presented a figure of whose appearance he need not be ashamed. He composed his head more comfortably, and then, without disturbing his position, selected a strawberry from his basket and, with a hand which knew no slightest tremor, he raised it to his lips.

Cluny, emerging from the elevator and encountering face to face the other principal actors in the tragic drama, halted; then he bore down upon them, a mountain of agitated flesh. Donovan took one step forward and waited.

"Look," bellowed Cluny, rage at last succeeding to the numbing dread with which the proximity of the poisoner had affected him. "Look at them! Look at them, will ye? Poison! Poison's in 'em. "His face was convulsed, his hands shaking, and his bronzed cheeks ashen. "That's what he tried to do to me—*me!* By an effort he mastered himself partially. "I'm goin' to the police with them berries," he said, savagely. Then he added, "And with the rest that I know."

Donovan clutched his arm, his eyes burning with some prescience of what the man would say.

"What are you saying?" he demanded. "Poison! Who tried to poison you?"

"Xavier Caron," said Cluny through his teeth, "the man that poisoned your brother" here he turned upon Nérée "—as I kin prove. I got the facts—all the facts."

Donovan's voice was harsh, hoarse. "Xavier Caron poisoned his nephew—and you can prove it? Don't lie to me, Cluny."

"Do I act like a man lyin'—with *them* in my hands?"

Donovan's hand drew Nérée forward roughly. He thrust her, as it were, under Cluny's eyes. "You know she is innocent? You can prove it?"

"I'm a-goin' to," Cluny said, savagely. "I'm a-goin' to git him."

Nérée stood bloodless, numb, unbelieving, tottering upon her feet. She could not speak, could not move, dared not credit. Her eyes turned piteously to Donovan, but he had no eyes for her. Curtly he spoke to Odilie.

"Here—take her to a room. Look after her till I come back. You, Cluny, come . . . and if you've told a hair less than the truth, God help you. Come, man, come." And Cluny, no less eager than Donovan—his eagerness for vengeance upon the man who would treacherously have destroyed him—lunged toward the door.

It was hours before Donovan returned from that scene, so bitterly ironic, where Cluny destroyed what he had built up; where he succored where he would have destroyed. His treasured facts, hardly won, to wring ignoble fortune from the wickedness he had surprised, became, against his will, the instruments of Nérée Caron's salvation. Of such elements is sometimes the justice of Heaven, which permits malignancy to thrive that malignancy may turn upon itself to the benefiting of rightness. . . .

It was dark when Donovan returned to the Château to find

Leandre pacing to and fro in the lobby, awaiting with fevered anxiety his coming.

"Did he lie? Is it well with her? Of a truth, is it well?"

"It is well," said Donovan.

"She waits for you."

Donovan stood looking at his friend a moment. "Not there, not under a roof. No, Leandre. Go to her, my friend. Bring her to me—there." He pointed outside to the broad esplanade which overhung the river. "There I will tell her; there I will speak to her. Bring her there."

He went outside, walking steadily, and leaned upon the railing set to guard the lip of the cliff, and there presently Nérée came to him—alone—and, speaking no word, he took her hand in his and together in a silence they walked along that magnificent prospect, lofty, suspended in the night between sky and river. Once before he had walked that way. At the remote extremity, with the stern rock upon which rests the Citadel lifting its frown above them, with the precipice dropping sheer to the gray and glamourous river below, he halted and released her hand and stood back from her a little.

"Nérée," he said, "it is over. You are safe."

"*Safe!*" she whispered.

He hesitated, and then, speaking very softly, slowly, he said: "I have been wrong—it is a wonderful world! And there is a patient and merciful God!"

"I am glad," she said.

"In everything I have been wrong,—in my thoughts, in my life. Wrong and blind. Friendship and honor and truth and love—these are not mockeries, Nérée—they are living things."

"Yes," she said.

"It is a beautiful thing to know."

"Beautiful indeed."

"It is strange," he said, after a moment and speaking mus-

ingly, "that I could not avoid you—even when I—in my foolishness—believed you and all women evil."

She smiled a little. "No, it was not strange," she said.

"I despised you," he went on. "I ran away from you. I set my will to wrench you out of my life—but I could not do it."

"Of course you could not do it," she said, gravely.

"And I had to come back to you."

"I was expecting you."

"You were expecting me?"

"From the beginning."

Silence fell upon them both, the silence of those upon whom rests the glowing knowledge of the miracle of love.

"There is no need for words between you and me," he said.

"But words are very sweet to hear." He could not see her face, but he knew she smiled up to him wistfully.

"Nérée! . . . Nérée! . . . Have I saved enough from the wreckage to—dare to offer it to you?"

"What have you saved, Donovan?"

"First of all—love. There are not years enough in life to tell you all my love."

"That is enough," she said, softly. "If you have saved love you have saved enough. Tell me that you love me."

"I love you," he said, simply.

"And I," she said, "have loved you from the beginning—almost the beginning."

"From the beginning! You could love Le Malcœur—?"

"No,"—She was smiling now with happiness,—not Le Malcœur—never Le Malcœur—but the wounded, lost, unhappy boy who pretended, oh, so hard, that his heart was bad. It was he I loved."

"What a day!" he exclaimed. "What a day!"

"A day of miracles!"

"It is the first day of my life."

"Of our life," she said. And then, "Something drew us together from the beginning—on that dreadful night—"

"Flame among blades of grass," said Donovan, softly.

"What is that?"

"It is what I said when I first saw you, Nérée, and I said something else that for a year I have tried to forget?"

"And that?"

"I said," he answered, "that you looked as if a man could check his life with you and find it safe and cared for when he returned."

"You said that—on that night? Oh, that was a sweet thing to say!"

"I tried to deny it for a year. But in spite of everything that was how I thought of you, and it frightened me. I dared think of no woman as one with whom I could check my life."

"And it was after that we met—face to face—*down there*." She pointed.

"It was another man you met in the darkness," he said, "and, thank God, he is dead."

"But this man who lives—what does he think? Is he willing to check his life with me?"

"If you will give me yours as security," he answered, and after that silence fell between them as she came close to him so that her body touched his, his arms inclosed her—and in the night and the silence and the majesty of the spot their souls fused, and for the hour lost each its identity to become one.

"We are free," she said at last. "I have only you in all the world and you have only me. In nothing need we consult anyone but each other. It was lonely before—while I waited."

"Something made you think of that," he said. "What was it, Nérée?" And then, irrelevantly enough, "I love to speak your name." But he did not await her answer. Because they were

so unified, so of each other, he read her thoughts. "It was our marriage," he said. "We have only ourselves to satisfy as to the when and the where."

"It was that," she said.

"We need each other. The light goes out as if I were blind again when you are not with me."

"We need each other," she agreed, with a little sigh.

"Then—"

"I am ready," she answered.

"To-morrow?" he asked.

"To-morrow," she said. "And, Donovan, may I have my way of it?"

He lifted her face in hands that trembled. "Your way," he said, "will be always my way."

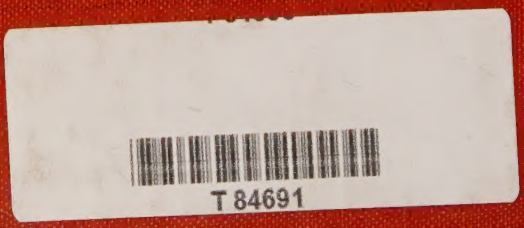
"Then," she said, "let it be *there*—in the church at Ste. Anne de Beaupré. It—somehow, my dear, it seems to me we could be married in no other spot."

"To-morrow," he said.

"*To-morrow,*" she whispered.

"Flame among blades of grass," he whispered in her ear. "Flame among blades of grass. . . ."

THE END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